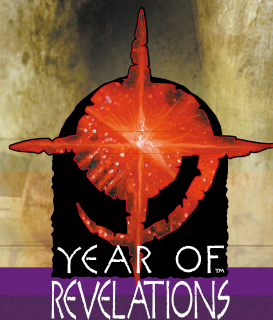


# the BITTER ROAD™



THE DISCIPLE'S SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR IMAGE: THE ASCENSION®



# *the* BITTER ROAD™



KNIGHT OF DYNASTY

BY LYNN DAVIS, ERIC P. TAYLOR II AND RACHELLE UDELL

## CREDITS

**Authors:** Lynn Davis, Eric P. Taylor II and Rachelle Udell

**Additional Writing:** Kevin A. Murphy and Jess Heinig

**Development:** Jess Heinig

**Editing:** Carl Bowen

**Art Direction:** Aileen E. Miles

**Interior Art:** Joe Corroney, Langdon Foss, Steve Prescott, Alex Sheikman

**Cover Art:** Christopher Shy

**Front and Back Cover Design:** Aileen E. Miles

**Layout and Typesetting:** Aileen E. Miles

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735 PARK NORTH BLVD.  
SUITE 128  
CLARKSTON, GA 30021  
USA

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# PRELUDE: A MEETING OF MINDS



Under the vaulted ceiling of a tremendous chamber, Kyle felt insignificant not only by dint of inexperience but also by architecture. He'd come to meet the Traditionalists at Lee Ann's insistence — "The broadening experience will do you good," she'd said — but he hadn't expected an ornamental manor, a gathering of strange individuals with distinctly uncanny traits.... He wasn't sure what he'd expected.

Overseeing the house was Alistair, a skilled Hermetic mage of some distinction. His hair just graying and his presence powerful, the mage projected the authority of a leader or a teacher, which he was. He was a master linguist, in fact, who specialized in academic translations. As Kyle took in the statuary, tapestries and well-maintained indoor gardening, he adjusted his appreciation for linguistics upward a notch.

"Let's come to order," Alistair pronounced in a slow and resonant tone. He remained standing at the head of his large, wooden table, as various other individuals that Kyle didn't know — a woman in a strange, tight skinsuit, a short man with simple tattoo designs and feathered trappings, a haggard paramedic — took their own seats.



Lee Ann, for her part, lounged in one of the tremendous chairs and motioned for him to do the same. Kyle took a seat uncomfortably and waited to learn.

Alistair nodded once in his direction. "It seems we have new blood. You've brought in another stray, Lee Ann?"

Lee Ann nodded without much emphasis. "Yeah. He needs a little training, but he's got talent, and he'll go a long way." She shot Kyle one of her impish grins.

Alistair peered out from under his bushy eyebrows as if scrutinizing Kyle for some sort of hidden defect. Eventually, he nodded once. "Very well, he shall be counted among our number by your word until such time as he is released and considered a competent magus of his own," Alistair intoned with some formality. A moment later, he too sat down.

"It's good to have you, kid," the woman in the skinsuit said. "We've been suffering enough losses lately. We need all the help we can get." General nods around the table assented to her assessment.

Alistair held up a hand to silence the murmured concerns. "We have old business first. This new recruit..."

"Kyle," Kyle put in helpfully.

"Kyle," Alistair continued, "will catch up as we go." He nodded to his left, toward the paramedic.

"Local situation? Crime's as bad as ever. I still see a never-ending stream of trauma patients. No exceptional ones yet," the paramedic said bitterly.

Alistair simply nodded. It seemed that they'd grown accustomed to the paramedic's negative demeanor.

"Technocracy's lying low," the woman in the skinsuit noted. "Apparently we're not the only one with problems. Their trans-dimensional technology isn't working right, and they have lost a lot of their contact with their outposts. Plus, much of their hyper-tech is failing too. We can expect that they won't be bothering us as much; they have problems of their own now."

The tattooed man sighed in evident relief. "That's good," he said. "Maybe I can stay for a few extra days." He grinned lopsidedly. Kyle noted that some of his tattoos seemed intermingled with scars.

Alistair cleared his throat and continued. "My own resources remain stable. My library is the primary source for our information, and it will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. However, I've received word that a herald is arriving from a Chantry in Portland, Oregon."

The paramedic mumbled something. Lee Ann perked up and straightened in her seat. "Any word about what he wants? Good news?"

"Apparently," Alistair continued, "he simply wishes to establish regular contact between our cabal and his Chantry. They offer an exchange of information and training. They too have no contact with our former mentors and leaders. Word has spread that there will be a new Council. A meeting will be convened, although an exact location and schedule has not yet been determined. At this meeting, the attendees will choose their new Tradition leadership."

Lee Ann looked suitably impressed. "But if we don't have any remaining Masters..."

"Then we take what we can get," the other woman finished. She flexed her mesh gloves. "We have to move on. Our fighting may be at a lull but we have to find out what's happened to others of our kind, get ways to train them and ourselves, continue our projects and root out problems." General nods agreed with her position.

"Well, then, we'll need a representative and herald," Lee Ann supplied. "I'm kind of busy. I've got my eye on a couple of candidates for our little conspiracy."

The paramedic shook his head balefully. "Too many people dying around here. I can't go."

"What about him?" the skinsuited woman asked, pointing to Kyle. "He's untainted by our personal biases, and he needs a job to prove himself anyway." Kyle swallowed, and his nervousness rose.

The tattooed man snorted. "Wait, are you proposing making him our de facto leader?"

"No, no. Just our herald, I suppose. Besides, he's got a lot to learn, and we're going to be stuffing his head anyway — might as well bring him up to speed on the politics as well as the magic."

Alistair nodded slowly. "I concur. Kyle, have you been inducted into a Tradition at this time?"

Kyle shook his head. "No sir, but Lee Ann has told me a little about them."

At that, the various mages about the table took on predatory looks. Kyle had a feeling that he was about to become the center of a tug-of-war....





# INTRODUCTION



## WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Somewhere far to the south, the forest burned. Trapped men blackened and perished in the flames while their expensive equipment and corporate structures crumbled.

Safely hundreds of miles away, Xoca murmured into a banged-up telephone as he huddled in the tiny public phone space. The line was scratchy, but he'd actually managed to get an international call through. He was fortunate — Mark wasn't someone who was readily available for just any phone call. Still, he was going to need a little help, and he knew that his recent successes had pleased his ancestors enough to mean that they'd help him. In this case, that meant that they'd help him get in touch with Mark, who could get him what he needed.

"You need what?" Mark barked over the phone. Mark's reputation for incredible escapes was built partially on his knee-jerk response to improbable requests. He'd let everyone know just how impossible the request really was, then he'd jauntily fulfill it and reap the accolades of amazement.

"It's just for a few days, Mark," Xoca soothed. "A place to lie low. You know that they aren't trading information as well as they used to." He shifted the phone from one shoulder to the other, turning slightly to make sure that nobody at the run-down gas station was tampering with his stolen truck.

Mark started his characteristic wheedling. "You're asking me to get you a visa out of the country on a false name, with no notice and with the authorities on your tail. With your reputation?"

"I'm telling you that if you don't, I'll very likely die here." Xoca let a bit of annoyance creep into his voice. "I wouldn't have called if you couldn't do it."

"Yeah, well... this would take some serious mojo. Like, favors. And a lot of legwork. It's not something that would be easy, mate." Mark danced around the issue of his price.

Xoca decided to cut through the crap; he had no patience for such things. He preferred to approach the world head-on. "Here's what I have to give. I can get you several thousand dollars worth of rare jewels, two translations of Mayan calendar rites dealing with astronomical phenomena



and a set of dossiers on transfers of North American perspectives to South American posts. That is, who's leaving your neck of the woods and coming down to mine."

Mark paused. Finally, he gave in to the straight-and-narrow approach. "Transfer dossiers? How recent, and routed through who?"

Xoca snorted once. "This morning, and I ain't tellin'. You can get me and get them, or not."

"Right. Umm... I'll make a few calls. Where exactly are you, anyway?"

Xoca squinted out at the landscape, briefly checked direction by the sun, then answered, "Southern Mexico."

"Can you be a little more precise?" Mark said petulantly. "No."

"Fine," Mark huffed. "Call me again in six hours; and I'll let you know. But it'll be all-or-nothing — you get to the flight, and you get out. If you miss it, I can't help you. And there's one other thing. You're going to help me with a little academic annotation project I've been doing. I can use another pair of eyes."

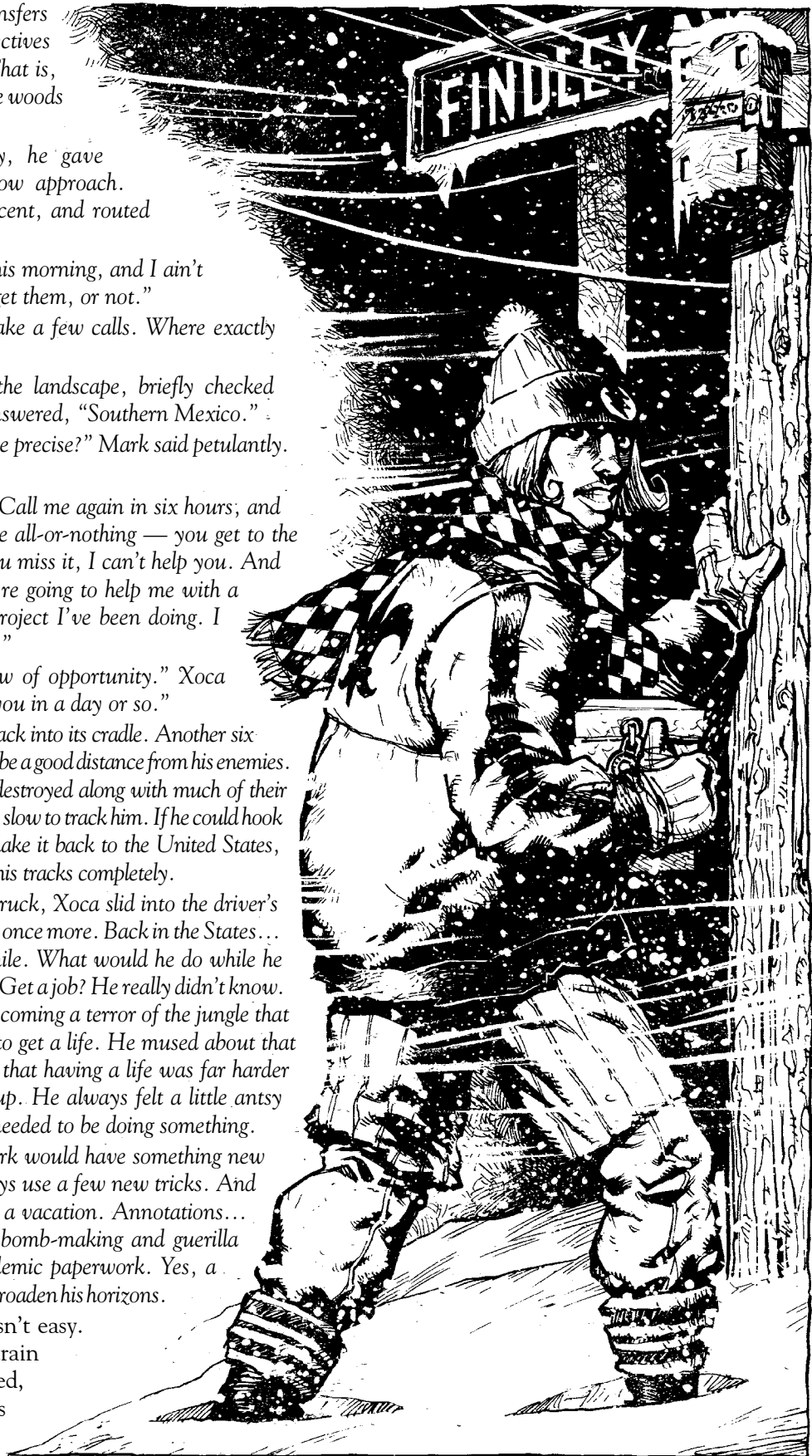
"All I need is a window of opportunity." Xoca grinned. "And thanks. See you in a day or so."

Xoca slung the receiver back into its cradle. Another six hours of driving north and he'd be a good distance from his enemies. Their coordination had been destroyed along with much of their base of operations, so they'd be slow to track him. If he could hook up with Mark's flight, he'd make it back to the United States, and he'd be able to obfuscate his tracks completely.

Returning to his stolen truck, Xoca slid into the driver's seat and started up the engine once more. Back in the States... he hadn't been there in a while. What would he do while he "lay low"? Take in an opera? Get a job? He really didn't know. He'd spent so many years becoming a terror of the jungle that he had neglected to... well, to get a life. He mused about that a bit. Eventually he decided that having a life was far harder than simply blowing things up. He always felt a little antsy when away from home; he needed to be doing something.

Then again, maybe Mark would have something new to show him. He could always use a few new tricks. And maybe it really was time for a vacation. Annotations... Xoca was used to teaching bomb-making and guerilla warfare, not critiquing academic paperwork. Yes, a little change would definitely broaden his horizons.

Surviving as a mage isn't easy. There are Apprentices to train and Masters who've vanished, and the Technocracy is breathing down every-



one's neck. Add to that mess the fact that nobody can seem to work together and that there's a whole supernatural world out there ready to exploit or kill an unwary mage, and it's enough to make even the most devoted sorcerer give up hope. What's a mage to do?

Ascension's a bitter road. It's a long path, fraught with pitfalls, and it's not even the right one for everybody. Every mage must find her own way in the world, and this book is here to help. For those who pursue Ascension, it's tough to say what works and what doesn't. The Ascended don't come down from on high with hint manuals. For those who just need to survive from day to day in the topsy-turvy world where the Reckoning has come, though, there's a lot of advice that may help.

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

Herein, you'll find advice for both players and characters — some couched in fables and stories handed down by mages in the World of Darkness, others in some additional rules or characterization suggestions for players to bring to their games. As always, take this information with a grain of salt. When reality is subjective, the Truth is malleable.

You'll also find some startling bits of information from the Year of Revelations. Mages are just picking up the pieces from the Reckoning, and it looks like the war is just heating up for its endgame. What you learn here might save your mage or tear his sanity apart. Tread carefully....

**Chapter One: Welcome to the War** explores the state of the World of Darkness for surviving mages. You'll discover the recent fallout of the Ascension War and what it means to get saddled with the debts and problems of the Traditions. Wizard marches, warfare and new expatriates... watch out!

**Chapter Two: Everyday Life** examines how mages get by in a world full of Sleepers who'd fear or hate them if the Sleepers only knew the truth. It's a broad world out there, and there's a lot to do. More than just a travel-guide, this chapter looks at some of the institutions of the modern world and how mages might get involved in them or run over by them. Mages have lives, too, and they go to schools, clubs, universities, businesses, factories, war zones, churches and all the other places that you'll find people.

**Chapter Three: Traditional Ties** dives into the responsibilities and authority of Disciples in the Traditions. Nowadays, the Disciples have to do just about everything, from maintaining Chantries, to training Apprentices, to forging forward with their Tradition education. How do you do it? What does the Tradition say about taking on more responsibility when you barely understand a little magic yourself? Examine heralds, the construction of Chantries, Sanctum-building, Wonder creation, advanced magical studies and the formation of new factions within the Traditions.

**Chapter Four: A Magical World** opens the door on how Disciples deal with the rest of the craziness out there in the mystical nights. It may be tempting to seek out vampires and werewolves for aid, but it's dangerous. Plus, mages tend to attract strange phenomena. Here are some examples, and some lessons to learn from.

**Appendix: A Little Magic** covers new rules, including additional character creation options, some Merits and Flaws, and a few new ways to look at your mage's Backgrounds — especially if you plan to become one of the new leaders of the Traditions!





# CHAPTER ONE: WELCOME TO THE WAR

K. —

*Here's that transcription you asked about. I've added in my notes. Mark's comments are valid, and it makes me wonder where he's getting all of his information. Then again, you know the stories...*

— X.

October 10, 1999

Well, it's finally over. At least it's over for them. Miles to go before I sleep. This evening began as yet another dismal chapter in the unending downward fall that has been my life for the past five years. Carmen left me — my Apprentice. She asked way too many questions about my past, about secrets long buried, names, numbers, weak links. I know she's got reasons. Don't we all? But I couldn't lose another to this madness.

I waited in front of the Met for about an hour, hoping she'd walk it off and come back. But when she didn't, the

despair came crashing in on me, and I started wandering the city. Ended up in front of the Majestic (big surprise!), staring at Swarna through the greasy windows. Like a lighthouse, I can always count on finding her when I'm lost at sea. Carmen says I should let her know I'm alive. But she doesn't understand. Separated from one another, Swarna and I have something that borders on a remainder of sanity. Put us together, and the collective force of our memories would drive the both of us stark-raving loony. So, alone and sane it is.

But earlier tonight, I was all set to say the fuck with that and go talk to her. Someone stopped me, thank God. I was standing there, watching Swarna flag down a waitress to refill her coffee, when this voice came sailing over my shoulder.

"Ello, 'ello. If it isn't little Jamie Lightwood. Or are you still insisting on calling yourself 'Winter' these days?"

I turned around and there he was, grinning like a fool. Mark-fucking-Gillan, one of the few people in

the world that I could truly call my friend. Hadn't seen that bastard in forever. He shifted his focus to the diner across the street.

"She's beautiful," he said, after a moment. "Damn shame about what happened."

"You don't know the half of it," I replied and went back to watching her.

"I've heard stories." Mark rummaged in the pocket of his coat and produced a slim silver case. "Cigarette?"

"No thanks." I shook my head. She was stirring now, and I reached out to listen to the rhythmic clink-clink-clink of metal on stoneware. Nobody can stir a cup of coffee like my Swarna.

"That's quite a disappearing act you pulled. You know you're a difficult person to find these days?" Gillan lit up, dragged, exhaled in satisfaction.

"With good reason," I replied. "I didn't exactly leave my Tradition on the best of terms. Hell, you ought to know. Last I heard, your old Hermetic friends weren't exactly ready to greet you back with open arms."

"Point taken."

"What are you doing here anyway? I didn't think the Rotten Apple was quite your scene."

"Actually, I was coming to see Swarna." He looked away, inhaled. My stomach knotted, and I went on the defensive.

"What the hell d'you want with her?" I barked. Then I realized how stupid I sounded.

"Easy, Jamie," Mark grinned. "Nobody's challenging your Alpha Male status."

"Fuck you. Answer the question."

My friend took a few more drags on his cigarette, tossed it into the gutter, whistled low.

"Well James, my boy, it's all gone to hell in the damned baby basket."

"Oh? What's up?"

"It's a long story, but in a nutshell, the War for Ascension has officially been declared a lost cause. It's over, my friend. It's all over."

"What? Over? What the hell happened?"

"Got a while? Why don't we discuss this somewhere other than in the middle of the street?" Mark stepped off the curb toward the Majestic.

"Wait! Not here. I can't... Just not here." He stopped, looked at me, looked back at Swarna and nodded.

"I understand. Let's go somewhere else."

A half-hour later, Mark and I sat at a table in SushiZen, a pot of hot sake between us. Not a word had been spoken since we left the Majestic. For my part, I was still trying to swallow his statement. I won't even hazard a guess as to the reasons for his silence. Mark was a deep one when he was young, and the world has abused us both a lot since then. Anyway, he poured and stared at the steaming clear liquid for several minutes before he spoke.

"When did you know it was over?" he asked. "When did you realize that the Associates couldn't continue?"

"God, Mark..."

"Look, you're gonna have to talk about it some time. It's been five fuckin' years; you've got to be past it by now."

"Five lifetimes won't get me past what I've been through."

"James, you owe me. I didn't have to tell you about all that Helekar shit, but you asked me as a friend, so I told you. Now I'm asking you as a friend. Besides, I'm going somewhere with this. When did you know it was over?"

"We were over long before we started. I don't know what made us think we could go against the Technocracy without the support of our individual Traditions and the blessing of the Council, but we had to do something. Lord knows that they weren't. Anyway, I think the real turning point was realizing that the Technocracy wasn't responsible for any of our terminally screwed up formative years. You know? Swarna's parents being killed, my mum's death?"

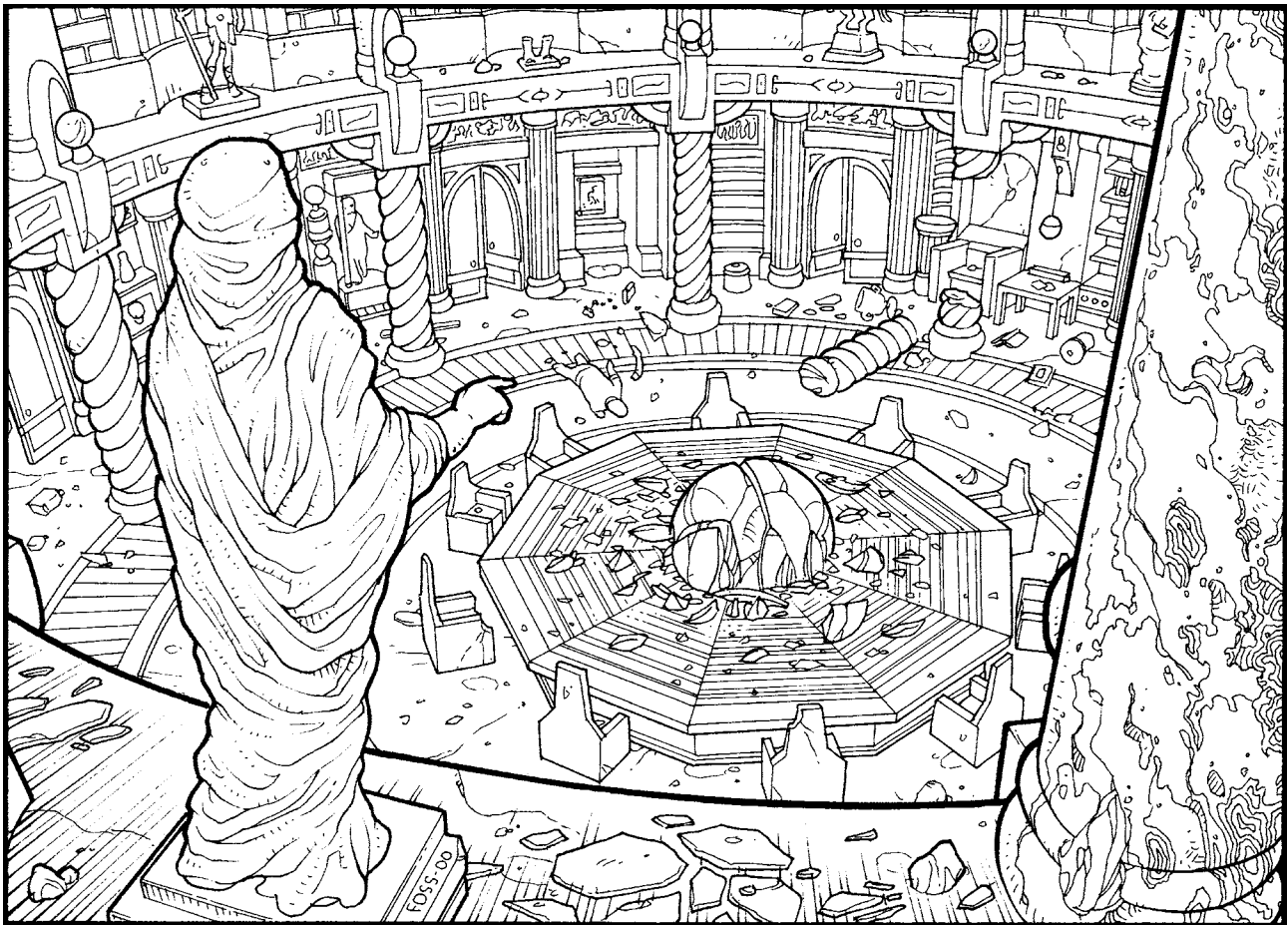
*Given the usual indoctrination of most Tradition students, this is a bombshell. Still, it's undeniable. The premise of the whole War was the right to remake the world into a mystic form. That's clearly not going to happen. The real question is why it took so long to realize. We'll have our successes here and there, and we can keep magic for some people. For most of the world, it's just going to be business as usual.*

*Of course, the fighting won't stop, but the goals are different. Technocrats will still hinder us, and we'll have to fight. There's little future in attacking Technocracy bases or agents. We fight for the causes that we pick. Without the Council handing down pronouncements about who we should fight and how we should war with the Technocracy, it's up to each individual mage to fight for his own causes.*

*I foresee a little strife among the Traditions. In the end, though, I think this may do us good.*

— X.





Before diving into Winter's psychology, it's noteworthy that the Associates — a relatively successful war cabal — fell apart. It's inevitable for a war cabal to fall apart at some point; eventually, they always lose. What's more important is looking into the impetus for them. Why did so many war cabals form? Obviously, the Traditions indoctrinated students with the importance of 'striking against the Technocracy'. But as Mark points out, this accomplished only limited goals.

Were we foolish enough to propagate conflict for hundreds of years even after it became clear that it accomplished little? Or did some agenda cause the Traditions to promote futile warfare with the Technocracy in a conflict over ideology that wouldn't be resolved with simple combat?

Now there's a brightening thought. Imagine that, for some reason, the Tradition Council wanted to keep the Initiates busy fighting a futile war with the Technocracy while they did their own thing. After all, how often did one see one of the Masters or Archmages on the field of war? Or perhaps it was simply to weed out the unfit from those with the mettle to really struggle for Ascension. But then that assumes that bloodying one's hands somehow makes one more fit to Ascend. Did the Council really want this war, or did the different Anarchs of the mages involved somehow drive it?

Speculation, of course, but from there the door opens to real questions.

— X.

"Your mother's murder. Who was responsible for that?" Mark asked. He sipped his drink. "Or do you know?"

"Let's just say that House Helekar wasn't the only source of corruption within the Euthanatos."

"And?" He gestured for me to continue.

"And what?"

"What do you know? Don't think I'm letting you off easy here."

I muttered a vitriolic curse, drank two shots of sake in rapid succession, and closed my eyes. The pain came anyway. "I always thought that my father was a rat-bastard. I just never realized how much of one he truly was. He always told me that a Man in Black killed my mum. Turns out, he did it himself. Didn't even blink."

"How'd you figure that out?"

"I was there. I was just a little kid at the time. Bastard put up a block in my head so I wouldn't remember."

"Christ, Jamie, I had no idea. I'm sorry I even brought it up," Mark whispered. It was a sign of our friendship that he allowed even the slightest furrow to appear between his eyebrows. Usually Mark was completely unflappable. He drained his cup.

"That's not all," I said and took a deep breath. "Apparently all your jumping up and down over the corruption in Helekar got someone's attention in the hallowed halls of Hermes. I mean, what better excuse for harassing the rest of the Euthanatos? Dad was already tainted. Jhor, you know? And he was up to something big. To this day, I still can't figure out what. At any rate, he went on another little spree and killed seven people, two of whom were Swarna's parents. Unfortunately, she witnessed the whole thing. Trouble is, dad didn't have the time to clean up properly."

"So he didn't work any sort of mental mojo on her?"

*In the larger picture, this question is important as well: What sort of unfinished business are we going to have to clean up? It's a sure thing that the Masters didn't plan to leave all of their pet projects unattended here on Earth. It's also a sure thing that they didn't tell us all of their plans. Although the death of Masters opens up opportunities, it also means that there will almost certainly be traps in some of them. I foresee a lot of cursed Wonders, berserk automatons, wards and time-space anomalies. And it's going to be up to us to clean up these messes before they get out of hand.*

— X.

"No. But he knew she'd be a problem. When she got older and started asking questions, he sent out a few of his confederates to take her out. They left her to bleed to death in the snow. I mean, Chakravanti just don't do that sort of thing. Goes against everything we believe in. Lucky thing I just happened along when I did. Of course, when I found her, I had no idea who had attacked her or why. It was only much later that it blindsided the both of us."

"That's some seriously heavy info to have it just fall on you like that." Gillan combed his fingers through his hair. "So that's what did it? That's what convinced you to give up?"

"Pretty much. We knew we wanted to quit, but by that time, it was too late. We were stuck in it."

"Sounds familiar. I was really pulling for you guys. It took guts to get out there and do the right thing."

"Well, we were doing something. Whether it was the right thing..." I shrugged and poured myself more sake. It was time to change the subject. "So, we've lost."

"Yeah, but not in the usual sense. No final battle with the Technocrats or anything grand like that. Well, there was Doissetep, but that was something else entirely. No. It was more like a surrender, an acceptance of a defeat that had been decided many years earlier. I think they realized, at last, that the Technocracy was just too strong, too many of us were dying without making a difference. Of course, in our infinite wisdom, we thought that by dying we were making a difference. Rather foolish, don't you think?"

"Maybe," I considered. "I've made more of a difference now that I'm supposedly dead than I ever did when I was alive."

Mark smiled. "How so?"

"Well first of all, I just don't give a rat's arse anymore. I mean, there's no more Tradition bullshit, hidden agendas, clandestine meetings, none of it. I just live, as much as you can live like this. I read. I study. I avoid trouble and break it up if I see it coming anywhere near me. Every now and again, I'll trip over a kid or two what's got the spark and I teach them. They know who I am, who I was. But I don't teach them like we were taught. I don't teach them to fight; I teach them to survive. And in most cases, it's enough. There are a few rare cases — kids coming from one Tradition or another — where I get questions about the Technocracy and our great and mighty holy war. They want to know when they can start fighting, but I never give a straight answer. Eventually they leave."

"And you call that making a difference?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, I do. And you want to know why? Because I'm keeping myself sane and I'm keeping them alive. Everyone says that the Technocrats killed the Associates, but that's not true. We did it to ourselves. And it was my fault. Yes, the idea of it all, that was Swarna's, but I was ultimately responsible for her. I trained her. Trained her to fight to the death for an Ascension we knew we'd never see in our lifetimes. And that's what we did. Fought to the death. And look what it cost us."

Mark was silent. I flagged down a waiter and ordered another pot of sake.

"You want food, you order now," the man said in broken English. "Sushi bar close in twenty minute."

"We're fine, I think." I looked to Gillan for confirmation. He nodded. "Just the sake and the check." The waiter made a polite bow and went about his business.

"You were right, you know," Mark began. "When you said it was over before you started."

"Why is that?" I asked.

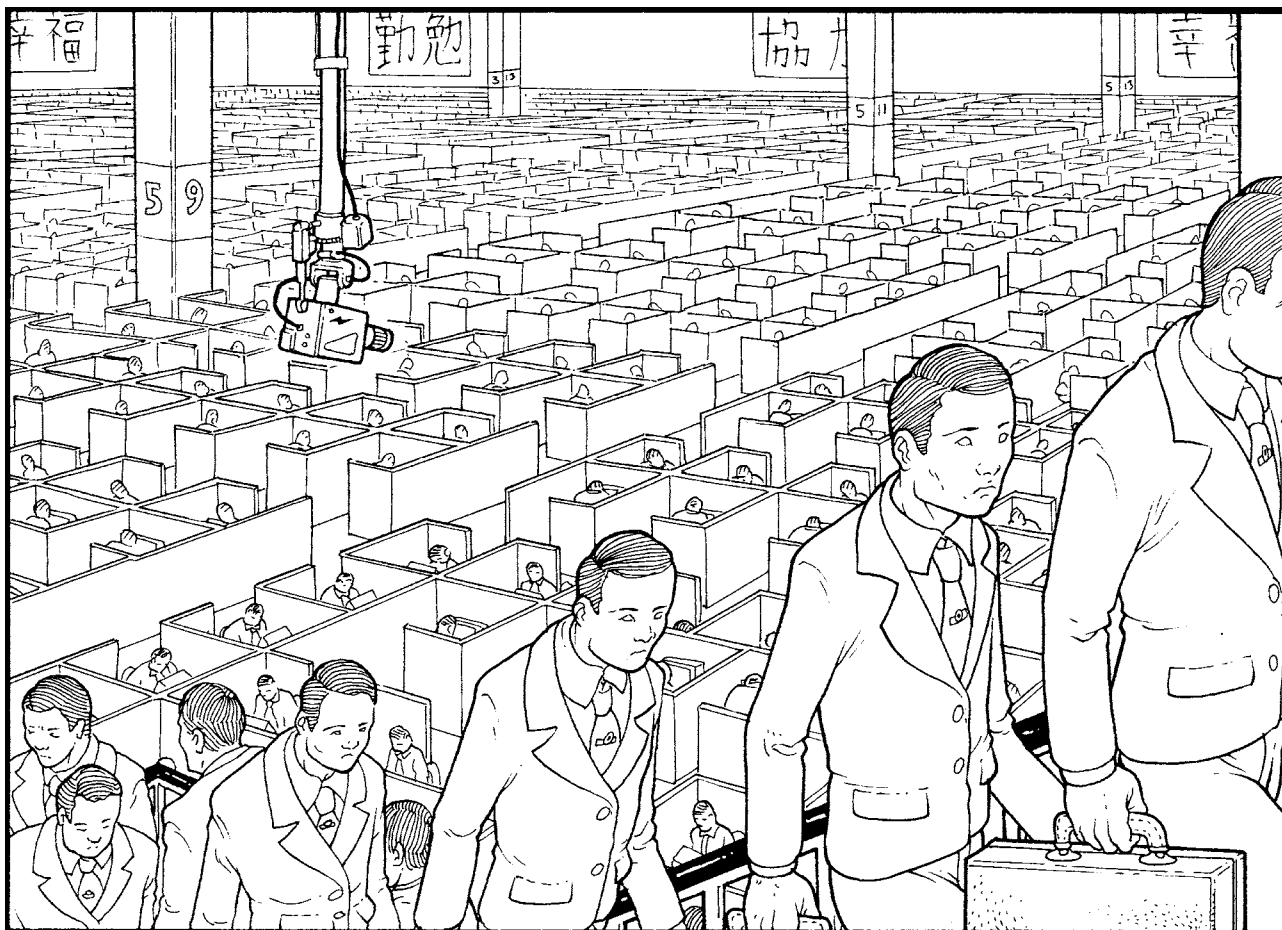


"Most of us on the outside could see that the War had become pointless and costly. There were even those within the Traditions who were questioning the sanity of fighting toward common Ascension. But like I said before, it was easier for the Council to struggle away in denial than to fully accept the truth. You all weren't the only ones bucking the system, but you were the most visible. For a while, some folks thought you might pull the whole thing off, but eventually they took you down just like they'd taken down so many others.

"We've always known, myself and others like me, that the Traditions are far too fragmented, far too enmeshed in their own petty affairs to wage any kind of consistent battle against the Order of Reason. And then, too, we realized something else. The Technocracy is necessary. Despite all the trouble its agents have caused us in the past, for all that its members have tried to imprison us, change us, twist us to their way of thinking, the Technocracy serves a purpose, a noble one if you come right down to it. Jamie, they're not the evil empire we've been led to believe they are." I suppressed a chuckle and shook my head.

"I cannot believe that I'm actually about to say this, but I have to admit that you're right. It's always occurred to me that their structure, their fierce adherence to organization, lends them a unique ability to control the more chaotic forces that exist out there. There are things that they know, things they keep contained and hidden from the eyes of the mundane world. If their walls were ever to crumble and fall, then all of us, both Sleepers and Awakened, would be at serious risk."

*This speculation of Jamie's brings up an uncomfortable notion — we know that Will and Belief shape the course of reality. What does this mean for the Technocracy? Do they have a stronger Will or a greater Belief that makes reality cleave to their standard? Or perhaps, do they simply exist out of the Traditions' need for an adversary? The Tradition Council never would have formed without the unbridled opposition of the Technocracy. Perhaps the existence of a monolithic, oppressive enemy stems not from any other imperative, but simply from the Traditions' own paranoid need for such an enemy.*  
— X.





"That's what frightens me the most right now," Mark said. "With every passing day, the Technocracy seems to be doing just that — crumbling in on itself. We both know, they're not all bad. As a matter of fact, in my own wanderings, I've met quite a few Conventioneers with very high ideals."

"And then you have places like MECHA, and this business with... what's the name of that corporation?"

"Ah, you mean that one Syndicate division. The name doesn't matter; it's just a label to slather over the double-dealing. Yes. The Technocracy has its share of corruption. A good healthy share. And that's what's rattling their collective cages right now. Stuff that's been buried for years and years is finally floating up to the surface. It's gonna be a rough road ahead."

"Yeah, for all of us," I mumbled. Mark gave me a serious look.

"We need to be prepared. That's why I wanted to talk to Swarna. We need to change our focus, and she's already headed in the right direction. You know she's training Orphans?"

"I'd heard." The waiter arrived with our sake and the check. Mark settled the bill and waited until the other man was out of earshot to continue.

"It's time to implement Plan B," he said.

"Plan B?" I raised an eyebrow.

"Don't laugh. It's time to take a good hard look at what we've been doing wrong for the past fifty or so years and correct it."

"All right. Sounds reasonable."

"For example, think back to your own training. What do you remember most about it?"

"That it was too fucking long and boring. I mean, ten years? It's a little excessive. And then all that protocol and kissing up to the Masters in the hopes that they'd throw you something, anything."

"Tell me about it," Mark laughed. "The Order of Hermes is not exactly noted for its open and expedient study program. What else?"

"Well. To be quite honest, I never really bought the whole party line. Yeah, I was raised with it, but still it never made all that much sense. I mean, come on. We, the great and mighty Awakened Ones, are mankind's only hope for Ascension, and therefore as masters of destiny must strive relentlessly against any and all that would work to undermine our goal? Give me a fuckin' break! It's ludicrous."

"Agreed. And that's why we need to stop training our Apprentices and Initiates as if they're going off to fight in some bloody cosmic war. We've been so busy

looking down our noses at each other for so long, that we never considered that the use of magic simply for survival and individual advancement might be the way to go."

*The Order of Hermes used magic simply as an individual advancement tool in the Middle Ages, and look where that got them...*

*It's interesting that so many Awakened students swallowed what the Traditions handed them for so long. Mages are often among the most innovative and intuitive of people, yet there seems to be a human need for structure that causes newly Awakened mages to cling to whatever their Tradition mentions tell them — perhaps because of their world turning upside down. Maybe this is why Craft members never really got involved in the Ascension War. Since they were already attuned to their cultural idiosyncrasies, they didn't have as much shock and adjustment after Awakening, so they did not feel the need to cleave so tightly to a newly embraced structure. Or maybe they were just smart enough not to butt their heads against the Technocracy.*

*Of course, there have always been mages who didn't go along with the War. They've been the exception for a while now. The Tradition Council made sure that its students got indoctrinated. Masters handing down pronouncements to Disciples on down to Initiates. When the Masters know more about magic than the student, the student perhaps takes too much at face value. Maybe politics have been too wrapped up in Traditional training for too long.*

*— X.*

"So what happens now?" I asked. "Do the Traditions simply dissolve, vanish into the mists or some crap like that? What about the Chantries and the structure that's there now? I mean, what? Was there a memo telling everyone to pack it in and go home?"

"I wish it were that easy. You and I both know that nothing with the Traditions simply dissolves. They've been discussing this in committee since time immemorial. They'll still be discussing it for at least another ten years or so."

We drank our sake and talked until they booted us out of the restaurant. Afterwards, we walked uptown through the theatre district, watching the common throng pass by.

"Any one of these people could be on the verge of Awakening," Mark said. He lit up another cigarette. "Any one of them could already be Awakened and in search of some answers."

"So what do we do about it?" I asked. "I mean, it sounds to me like all the high and mighty Masters have trundled off, leaving the rest of us to fend for ourselves."

"And that's about the right of it."

We found ourselves on the edges of Central Park, so we decided to head back to Lincoln Center and sit by the fountain. Mark continued to talk as we walked.

"It apparently started with the Verbena and the Dreamspeakers. They headed for the hills, Apprentices, Adepts and all. It took a while for the others to discover they were gone. They even deserted the remnants of the Council, so I hear. Well, you can only imagine the kind of brouhaha that commenced after that! The Choristers were pleased as punch that the pagans had finally vacated the premises until they stopped to ask themselves why. And then they started their own slow disappearing act. The Adepts and the Etherites, who had been taking the brunt of the damage up to that point, were the first ones to suggest surrender. Well, all except Dante, but then he's always been something of an iron juggernaut where the War's concerned.

"Anyway, there was a resounding 'No!' from the Hermetics, who had a great deal of pride invested in this whole endeavor. Of course, the Cultists had to ask, 'What war?', but then they've never been active enough in the physical world to care anyway. Surprisingly, it was an agreement between the Brotherhood and the Euthanatos that decided it all."

I blinked and shook my head to clear it.

"Did I just hear right? Did you say that the Akashics and the Euthanatoi *agreed* on something?"

"Yeah. Shocked the hell out of me too when I heard. Apparently they got tired of all the rest constantly bitching and moaning at each other. A decision was reached quickly. The current Traditions would remain intact. Minus the obvious parties, of course. In the meanwhile, the word was to go out that the Traditions had declared a cease-fire and retreat. Students were to focus on their own individual development and progress. Ascend if you want to and on your own time. That sort of thing. Instead of marching in lockstep with a Tradition, Apprentices and Initiates were encouraged to explore their own mystic goals and ambitions. Also, Disciples like us were directed to go forth and make ourselves available for those who seek guidance, training, whatever. The kicker, of course, is that this all comes from other Disciples who've taken leadership roles. The Primi are out of touch, and the Traditions are foundering, so it's really just whoever steps up to the plate."

"Man," I laughed. "I can almost feel the panic ensuing as we speak! They honestly expect people who have been hand-held all their magical lives to instantly charge forth and fend for themselves?"

"Now you see why I've been chatting you up all this while. It's going to be absolutely mad out there."

*No kidding.*

*For creative, cutting edge visionaries, mages as a group sure seem to fall easily into a Tradition ad. Some broke with Tradition in the past, but it wasn't nearly as common, probably due to threats like Censure and Branding. After all, such punishments would effectively prevent further training and magical advancement. These days, there just aren't enough mages to go around, so Traditions must offer incentives for people to stay. So that means relaxing their usual strictures...*

*Not only are the Traditions offering less guidance, but the students are accepting less direction. The Traditions will surely survive, but they will also almost certainly be changed.*

*Most importantly, Tradition leadership is changing rapidly. Without appreciable influence from Horizon, it's every Disciple for himself. Not only are Disciples taking on mentor roles, but we're seeing Disciples emerge as leaders, builders of new factions, heads of their respective Traditions. It's too early to give names to who'll stay and who'll go, but one thing's certain: it's anybody's ball game now.*

*— X.*

I nodded and watched the water jets spit up water in choreographed patterns. What my friend was telling me sounded true based on my own experiences, but there was still something nagging at me. I tried to take my mind off of it by searching for Carmen among the small pockets of people that lingered in the courtyard around us. She needed to hear what I was hearing. She needed to meet Mark Gillan. And as I thought about her, about our argument and her outraged zeal, something clicked. I had forgotten to ask a very important question.

"What about those who choose to take up the torch and carry on the work as usual? We both know certain individuals who would deliver themselves into the arms of the Grand Technocrat himself wrapped in a ribbon and tied in a bow rather than quit, lie down and die. You mentioned Dante. I could add some more names to that list. And what about all the other enemies out there? The Nephandi have taken lesser opportunities than this to chip away at us. Isn't anybody in the least bit concerned by this?"

Mark considered for a moment, trailed his fingers through the illuminated water. "You're absolutely right to ask that question. And it's true that there are those who will refuse to accept the mandate of the Council, such as it is. What's different is that those small pockets of Tradition warriors are now having to scrape up their own resources. Most of the old farts took their books, spells and incantations with them when they





vanished. Others took control of whatever Umbral Realms they were living in at the time, gave most of the residents the boot, closed the doors and changed the locks. They're having to fend for themselves. On the topic of the Nephandi, I think they're far too busy with the changes to the Underworld to bother with us. At least for the time being."

*Interestingly, Mark doesn't seem to know about Daria's disappearance — or else he simply isn't mentioning it. Curious, considering his recent work with Catharine Bliss from the Virtual Alephs.*

*The Nephandi situation seems much like World War 2. It's almost as if the disturbances that have caused so much chaos recently have hit them especially hard. Not that this is a bad thing.*  
— X.

"Speaking of prophecy, " I said. "There's this woman, lives in the East Village, says she sees visions of things to come. 'They' call her Phoenix, and she's drunk more often than not. She says she drinks to keep the voices quiet."

*Just what we need — another Phoenix.  
Then again, wasn't there something about that in some  
Hemetic prophecy?  
— X.*

"So do a great percentage of the other people in this city," Mark smirked. "What's your point?"

"Well, she's one of us, to start. And the things she says are bloody alarming if you stop to give them any concentrated thought."

"One of the mad ones, then?"

"No, I don't think so. Something big happened to her, messed up her head a little, but she's not completely gone. Some people can't claw themselves back up onto the field, you know?"

"So what's she say?" he asked. He'd put on his 'amused skeptic' face.

"Oh, some of the usual. You know... big day of reckoning coming, some major confrontation in the supernatural world, the beginning of a new era. There's also a bit of contemporary *fin de siècle* charm thrown in.



Apparently the Adepts aren't going to fare too well in the post-year-2000 thing."

Gillan chuckled. "Sounds like every other dime store psychic out there these days. Well, except for that bit with the Adepts."

"And except for the part about the Batini."

Mark stopped laughing. "S'cuse me, the what?"

"She says the Ahl-i-Batin are coming back. What's more, they never left. They weren't completely wiped out, just severely crippled. Shall we say there's going to be quite a house cleaning when they get back? Phoenix thinks that Nostradamus' prediction of a Middle Eastern army was in fact a vision of the Batini's return. At the very least, it will be a Batini leading the troops."

*This is perhaps the most startling bit of the transcript. Of course, this darken prophetic may well be wrong, but who can take that chance? The majority of Traditionalists these days don't even realize that the Batini were once a Tradition. If they're really getting ready for a resurgence, then it could be a major boost for the Traditions — or a sign of bad things to come.*

— X.

"Mmmmm. Sounds like we may indeed feel the bite of that old Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times."

"Yes," I replied. "But it's not all sackcloth and ashes, is it? I mean, think about it, Mark. We've finally got the freedom to do what we've wanted to do for the longest time. Mages aren't going to be limited by their Traditions any longer. True, it's going to be bloody difficult, but the potential is there for real growth and expansion. Perhaps this is what real Ascension feels like. Or at least the first step towards it."

"Could be, Rabbit. Could be."

"So. You can't be the only one with a plan. What have you heard? I mean, have the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena really vanished?"

"Not all of them. There are rumors, as is usual with anything mages do. They deal more with the realms of spirit, so sometimes they see things coming down the pipeline long before the rest of us. I spoke to one woman, a Verbena Initiate, who said that their oracles — not the Ascension kind, just the seers — had seen what she called another burning time. An era where technology is so strong and reality so defined in black and white that people outside that definition, people like us, will be singled out and hunted far more ruthlessly than we are now. Since both the witches

and the shamans have had trouble with that sort of thing before, they're headed for Sanctuary while the opportunity still exists.

"I also heard a rumor that some of the Dreamspeakers have been in contact with the wolves." Mark cast his gaze out over the random populace of the city for a few moments before looking back down at his shoes.

"That's odd," I said and scratched my head. "I thought the wolves didn't like us much, if at all. From what I've heard, they'd kill us as soon as look at us."

"Apparently one of their packs or tribes or whatever they call them has more of an indigenous history than the others. Given the current climate, it makes sense for the two factions to put aside any differences they might have and band together for a common cause. It's possible that they sense some kind of coming conflict as well."

*A startling notion, working with shapeshifters, and a dangerous one. Although a few individual Dreamspeakers may well have allies among them, I wouldn't recommend it for the majority, even as a Dreamspeaker myself. I suspect that this reference is hyperbole or just inaccuracy.*

— X.

"So what about the ones left behind? There are always a few that don't get the word."

"From what I understand, the Verbena at least have some sort of ally network through Sleeper pagan groups, metaphysical bookstores and the like. That way, they can direct those that want to leave to the outside meeting places and those that want to stay to safe havens. Also, it helps them find newly Awakened ones that are drifting towards their way of thinking. It's possible that the Dreamspeakers have their own network set up and their own covers and fronts in place. Especially given their Tradition's size. They do, after all, include a huge variety of groups from all over the world."

"And the others? Seems to me that the advent of a new technological age would be the signal to party for the Adepts."

Mark nodded and stamped out the cashed butt of his smoke. "I've heard rumors there too. That all the Adepts plan to rejoin the Technocracy and take the Sons of Ether with them. That the Adepts are going to have their own little civil war in cyberspace, those who wish to rejoin the Technocracy revolting against those who wish to continue the fight. There's word that even *they* are disappearing into the night, afraid that the coming change might compromise the Web."

"Either that, or they've heard things about the Batini that they've chosen not to share with the rest of us."

Gillan shrugged. "It's all speculation anyhow. Most of the Adepts I've run into over the course of my life have been more concerned with their own individual research on Ascension through technology to worry much about what's happening in the world of flesh."

"True. Of course I don't really keep up with them these days, but last I heard, the Euthanatos were trying to mount some big 'Back to India' thing."

"I'd heard that too," Mark said, laughing. "I have to admit. Your people are mighty strange. You and the Ecstatics. Organization has never been a big part of the Cult anyway. I'd imagine that they'll continue on, business as usual."

"And the Euthanatos will recede into the shadows, coming out only when it's necessary. I see them suffering the most from this change, and from the coming apocalypse, if it's indeed imminent. Those who study the karmic wheel are often feared and misunderstood. It wouldn't surprise me if a good number of them turned to vampire-hunting in their copious amounts of spare time."

"Vampire-hunting?" Mark asked. "I'd think the Death Mages might line themselves up with the Undead."

"Nope. The living dead are an abomination to most Chakravanti. They disrupt the natural turning of the wheel. The more of them in the world, the harder it is to maintain the balance between life and death. Although adversity does make for strange bedfellows. You could be right."

*The slivings among recent Tradition communic  es have me believing that the first strike against vampires may well come from the Order of Hermes, actually, but I wouldn't be surprised to see some Euthanatos in the hit teams. I'd personally advise against it, as much as I'd advise against talking to shapeshifters. These other supernatural's are just too damn unpredictable and dangerous.*

— X.

"Like I said, it's anyone's guess." He rose and stretched. "The one thing I'm certain of, though, is this: Regardless of what happens, the structures we call the Traditions will continue to exist. They might be changed on the surface, but at the heart, they'll continue. Perhaps the old Masters have had the last laugh after all. Do you remember Porthos?"

"Yes. Who doesn't remember Porthos?" I laughed.

"The old man was wacko, but he knew what he was doing. I think he realized that as we mages get older, we tend to stagnate and lose touch. He realized it's necessary for the old ones to step away from the table and let the new kids figure things out for themselves. It's possible that this latest abandonment has been a long time coming."

"You think?" I asked, and stood to stretch myself. Mark took a deep breath and pulled his coat a little tighter around his shoulders. A few couples lingered around the fountain, but the temperature had been steadily dropping, forcing most of the pedestrians to seek a warmer locale.

"Well, just look at you and Swarna. You didn't have to disappear out of her life. You could have picked her up, taken care of her yourself, gone on with your lives together. Why didn't you?"

"I ask myself that question all the time. I mean, every day, at some point, I go back there, revisit that sequence of events. We run, I get shot, and I see the look of absolute helplessness on her face. And then I'm yelling at her to run, even though I know I can pull off the Correspondence Effect for the both of us. But I couldn't do it, Mark. I couldn't take her with me. Because if I took her with me, she'd be helpless forever, she'd rely on me for everything. I had to let her go, let her hurt and bleed and cry, so she'd learn to fend for herself."

"And there, my friend, is the answer," Mark intoned. "A world of young mages has been left to learn for themselves. And it's painful. Any forced separation is. But we'll be better off for it in the long run. Oh, sure, there will still be mentors and teachers, and eventually some of us will declare our own Mastery of the Arts, but we'll have done it our own way by our own rules. Anyhow. I've taken up enough of your time, and I still want to see Swarna before I move on."

We said our good byes and parted ways. I watched Mark recede into the darkened jungle of taxicabs and neon, hunkering down further into that massive trenchcoat of his. My friend had been alone and on the run almost as long as I'd known him. Said he liked it that way; Traditions be damned. But I'd always suspected that he couldn't drift alone for long without wanting to make his own small difference in the universe.

When I got back home, I found Carmen waiting for me on my doorstep. She still thinks I'm a bastard for holding out on her, but she admits that she still needs a teacher, and I'm the only one she's got. So she's crashed out in her usual spot on my couch, and

I'm up writing this. I told her as much as I could about my meeting with Mark. Of course I had to give her the basic history lesson, and she fell asleep in the middle of it, so my own implementation of Plan B will have to

wait for tomorrow afternoon. Still, I can breathe easy. The madness is over. Finally I can get some rest. But like I said before, it'll be a long time before I sleep. Hell, there's just too much to do.

*And that, in a nutshell, is why our job just got harder but potentially more rewarding. We don't have the resources or knowledge to hold the hands of every Initiate. The Traditions have taken their lumps and, hopefully, learned some lessons. We've let people get too indoctrinated, though. We've suppressed the original thought that we were supposed to protect. We have to let Initiates make some of their own mistakes, learn the ropes in ways that are good for them, not just for the Traditions. Otherwise, they'll just keep dying pointlessly as they struggle to live up to Traditional goals that don't mean anything to them. This is what we have to teach — that the Traditions, like anything else, are just tools. We all need to decide what's important to us, instead of taking the same party line that's been propagated for a few centuries and assuming that it's the One Truth.*

*— X.*





# CHAPTER TWO: EVERYDAY LIFE

I've noticed a quirky phenomenon among young mages. Often, shortly after Awakening, they have a tendency to dive as deeply as they can into their new society. They hunger for understanding of what's driving them and for the magic that's become their bedright. All right, a few try to bolt back under the covers, but for the most part, they leap into the fray like wild lemmings, and they totally buck up their lives in the process. The existence of this phenomenon proves that even the Awakened can be pretty damn stupid.

I mean, the world doesn't stop being there just because you've Awakened. Apprentices have a little bit of an excuse: they're too clueless to know better. Their world has just been turned upside-down, and they're trying to make sense of it again. But too many of them get stuck in that mode. Instead of settling in, realizing that the things they believed before are still useful, they try to throw everything away and stumble in this totally new vision of the world. Then they get frustrated and annoyed when they lose their jobs, friends and families!

I tell you kids today. It's enough to make me weep.

Anyway, a contemporary of mine by the name of Ozzy went through something like that, and he was good enough to write down what he was going through. He'll explain himself further below, so read on.

— X.



3/15/96:

It always starts with the dream. Clear, solid and real. I'm walking down a desert highway. The asphalt is cracked, and what little moisture remains in the ground ripples up into the air in waves. Now I'm in front of a mailbox. It juts up out of the parched earth, a defiant metal thing. There's no house to claim it, and the small strip of concrete driveway next to it ends broken and dusty a few feet off. It's just a mailbox. An envelope weighs heavy in my hands. There's money, lots of it. Five thousand dollars to be exact. I know this because I can feel each individual bill, crisp, smooth and green. There's a napkin from the Standust casino with an address scribbled on it, and there is a black and white photograph. The man smiling out at me looks familiar. About 40. Business suit. Graying at the temples. As I study the face, I can see everywhere at once, all points from my one central point. The face in front of me, the car pulling up behind me, the weird nipple in the rock face a few feet off. The gentleman's neat, Windsor-knotted tie, the tall, lean woman emerging from flame, the dark men striding forth from the mountain itself. She says, Get in, and I know there is no question. I get in the car. The motor rumbles like no animal ever heard anywhere on Earth.

When I open my eyes, the man waits for me, perched on the end of my bed like some great, ancient bird, draped from head to toe in dark robes. Only his eyes are uncovered, and they glow blue in the dark. They push me back into the mattress; it's a weight I can feel. He speaks, but I hear a barely audible rasp. It drives me crazy. So much so that I'm forced to get up and go to my worktable. Even then, the structures, the things I draw... well, they're just weird. I work until I fall asleep again.

My wife Morgan doesn't understand, but she accepts it. She loves me, wakes me up in time for work with a kiss and hot coffee. Sometimes she gathers up her courage to ask me about the drawings, and then she begs me to sleep through the night just once. But I can't explain it. I can't tell her about the dreams and the Bedouin. I really can't tell her about the fine woman. The fine woman — she's the one I'm building it all for.

5/9/96:

Card Farrel has invited me to a party in Las Vegas tomorrow.

He's an enigma to everyone, including me, and I'm his best friend. Imagine the quintessential fresh-faced rich boy with great hair, designer clothes and a different car every month. He's *that* guy. The one who threw the wildest parties in college and yet managed to graduate at the top of his class. Of course he's insanely popular, but there's just something... odd about him. He makes people uncomfortable in ways they can't describe. Even women. They preen and flint and fall all over each other for the chance to talk to him, but it never gets them anywhere. I asked him about it once, and all he said was, 'Cody, I got to introduce you to this girl I know.' He's the only one who seems to understand my drawings, and he's the only one I show them to. Of course, he talks in terms of celestial mathematics and quotes from scholarly texts the names of which I've never heard before. But then, according to my wife, 'He's as crazy as you are.' She smiles when she says this.

'No excuses, Cody,' he says. 'Morgan's visiting her sister in Boston, so don't use your wife as a scapegoat. I expect to see you there.'

5/11/96, noon:

My life is over.

5/12/96:

Where do I fuckin' start? Card's party, I guess. It was a huge deal. People came in from as far away as London and Hong Kong, even. Card has always run with the fast and furious. But these folks were even more intense than usual. Things got started at 6 p.m. Twelve hours later, the DJ was still going strong, the drinks were still flowing, and the women still looked good. I ducked outside to get some air, and as I passed through the door, I tossed a



hello to a man, 40ish, with graying temples. He wore a nicely cut suit and a silk tie wound in a Windsor knot. I got an intense case of déjà vu, but nothing registered. I didn't know any better, so I shrugged it off. I wasn't out the door three minutes when the screaming started.

My charge back inside was blocked by a wall of maddened humanity that was fleeing for its life in the opposite direction. I'm lucky I didn't get my happy ass trampled to death. Weird sounds came from the main party area like static electricity and music funneled through a distortion filter. All of a sudden, the world became immense. I could hear and see everything at once. Don't know how. As I rounded the corner, I was living my dream. But this was a part I'd skipped. Chaos had put down sticks and set up shop. Screaming women. Screaming men. Blood on the floor, broken glass, the smell of fear, panic and urine. Strange man-like things clad from head to toe in some kind of leathery black skin. They wore masks that made them look like all-American football stars in bondage. These fresh-faced monstrosities chased and killed the formerly carefree guests with an eerie slowness bordering on nonchalance. In the center of it all, Card hung suspended in air, his face a sheet of pain, fear and agony. In front of him stood the man I'd said hello to. The one in the suit.

The one from your dream, dip-shit! Now hurry the fuck up!

That's what the voice shouted at me over the pandemonium. Two seconds later, its owner reached across the room, picked me up, and yanked me through a rectangular patch of non-space. Over the receding sounds of terror, I heard Card shout, The desert, Cody! Go now! Run! Then a scream and the dripping of something thick. My insides snapped. I think it was my heart, because this noise ripped out of me at a deafening level. I hurled it and all the confused rage that roiled inside me at the things that killed Card, watched as space contorted, melted and changed.

Shit! Now you've done it! Run damn it!

I ran.





Non-space was filled with thousands of throbbing streaks of light. I wasn't there for very long, thank God. Maybe only about five minutes.

In non-space I could see the body attached to the voice in my head. It was big. The seven-foot-tall variety of big. Swirling black robes enfolded it completely, except for the eyes that glowed a fathomless blue. The Man. He didn't match the voice at all. 'Who... what the hell are you?' I asked.

*What am I?* it replied. *Kid, I'm you. Now hang on, we're stopping. Just do what you're told, all right?*

Non-space skidded to a halt and dumped me out on a desert highway. This part I remembered. Well, not my stomach trying to turn me inside out, but the heat and the cracking pavement – now that was familiar. When I got to the mailbox, there was the envelope with the 5,000 dollars, the napkin from the Stardust casino and the photo of the man who killed Card Farnel. Like clockwork, the car pulled up behind me. I turned around. Real time was slow after non-space, so I got a good long look at the car and the woman emerging from it.

The El Camino was metallic black with iridescent flame detailing that moved and rippled along the sides. It looked like you'd burn yourself if you touched it. It was that real. Even the tint job on the windows moved and swirled. Fine in hell must look like that. Black and silver tongues licking and consuming all light.

'Get in!' she said. The girl was tall with long inky hair, copper skin and dark, serious eyes. She had on black boots, black leather pants and a cropped T-shirt that showed off her tattooed midriff. A ring of fire. I jumped in the car as Card's lethal party crashers emerged from the mountain. 'They'll catch up to us,' I shouted. 'I've been here before.'

She leveled that stare at me for a second, then nodded. 'Spin the wheel, friend. Think you know how?' She had the sexiest Chicano accent. I shrugged, closed my eyes anyway. Pictured a roulette wheel in my head and gave it a spin. Felt like I was gonna hurt again. When I finally opened my eyes I was lying on starched sheets that smelled like lavender. Home. The girl's face floated above me. Her hair hung down and tickled my chin. 'Cody?' she whispered. 'You awake now? My name is Zydeco Jones and I'm gonna help you out of this mess. Card sent me.'

My best friend is dead. There is a strange woman cooking eggs in my wife's kitchen and an El Camino in my driveway that is certain to generate an unending stream of gossip among my neighbors. I just held a magnifying glass up to the face of Hell, and it was the most horrifying, bowel-shaking experience I've ever had. I feel like I've been run through a garlic press. I'm coughing up blood, mucous and other weird substances. I think I touched something really out there today. Perhaps it was the source. That elusive universal energy that powers all my creations of fantasy. I want to do it again.

5/13/96:

Morgan just called. She says, 'You sound funny. Is something wrong?'

Me: 'Baby... There was an accident. Card is in the hospital.' The lie's more for my benefit than for hers.

Her: 'Oh my god! What happened? Is he going to be alright?'

Me: 'I don't know. I'm gonna be in Vegas for a little while, a week or so I guess.'

I'm not going to Las Vegas. I don't know where I'm going, but I can't stay here. I find myself staring off into space for hours at a time. I'm not just staring at the wall – I'm seeing other places, watching other people. This can't be possible, but it's happening. Zydeco congratulated me on awakening. Like I've even needed praise for getting out of bed in the morning. She's taking me to meet Card's boss. Funny, I didn't think he even had a job.

5/20/96:

I'd say I was crazy if only this didn't feel so right. Magic, so I'm told, is real. Zydeco introduced me to the rest of Card's friends. It's an interesting group of people.



Petrus – male, looks about 36, 37, is probably a lot older. General consensus is that he knows everything there is to know about everything. He's the leader of this organization and the one with the most experience. (Although I still don't know what this organization is exactly.) The others call him, Master Petrus sometimes, out of respect and on account of his talents. He considers himself a member of the Order of Hermes, but he claims to know the secrets of a host of other groups I can't remember the names of.

Dr. Priya Ganesh – female, 30ish. Note: Ganesh, in Hindu theology, is the remover of obstacles. She said she was delighted to meet another Scientist! (That's with a capital S and an exclamation point.) I told her I wasn't a scientist. I'm not. I'm an architect. She just smiled and said, 'Well see.' Zydeco told me to show her my drawings. The good doctor was quite impressed. She's given me a rather interesting book to read. It's weird, but it makes a strange kind of sense if you wrap your mind around it just right.

Zydeco Jones – already described, apparent age, 25. If Petrus is the brains behind this operation, then Zydeco is the brawn. I've never seen one woman carry so many different kinds of instant death. When I asked her if she could use them all, she gave me this look. Well, it answered my question. She likes to look at my drawings, especially the ones of the dream guns. I heard her whisper, 'I knew they were possible!' which leads me to wonder whether we're on the same dream frequency. I ask her about the Man, but all I get is another look.

My name is Ozymandias Cody, and you, intrepid friends, have just been reading the events of my life, circa three years ago. Sounds familiar, don't it? Big bad wake-up call, some really strange things, even stranger people trying to convince you it's all normal? Yes. I'm sure it does. But as you're well aware, the world as we know it has undergone some pretty radical changes in recent days, and it's no longer viable to rely on the traditional, the familiar or the tried-and-true. The game of survival has new rules.

Back in the day, magical folks had it easy. You Awakened — most times with help, sometimes without — and before you could say, "Forsooth and prithee...", some Master of the Arts snatched you up and put you away in a mystical place like Horizon where all you had to do was live outside time and learn how to be great and powerful. Sadly, those days are gone forever. Since the Maelstrom and the destruction of Doissetep, most of the old Masters are either dead or MIA, so the task of surviving out there is rather left to me and you.

The first piece of advice I can give you is this: Get through your Apprenticeship in one piece. That is, of course, assuming that you survived the initial shock of Awakening and got your shit together well enough to go out looking for a mentor. Managing to complete your training without fucking up is key to your continued happiness as a member of the tribe. It's best to find a mentor quickly. Problem is, Awakening doesn't exactly come with a welcome brochure and a fruit basket. So from day one, your mantra should be Pay Attention. That, and Don't Freak the Mundanes. Our particular variety of arts and crafts isn't exactly what

most folks would call normal. While it might seem cool to try out your newly acquired mystical powers on your unsuspecting friends, they're going to wig out 95% of the time when you do. Repeat your mantra, be very careful, and remember that the magic, or your Avatar, can sneak up on you in the beginning when you least suspect it.

Next hassle: mentors. I was lucky. My mentor, or rather mentors, found me. Most people aren't quite so lucky. Once again, boys and girls, Pay Attention. Mages are like supernatural homing beacons. They radiate. If you've got your eyes open, it should be relatively easy to spot others like you.

Unfortunately, that's not always a good thing. In a way, Awakening is like joining the Sorcerer's Mafia. Everybody belongs to one family or other, and you are convinced that your family is the greatest and the best. There are families you like and families you hate. And suddenly you have enemies you've never even met, just because you happen to be friends with one person or another. And that's the normal stuff. Wait 'til you get to deal with the weird shit. I'm talking vampires, werewolves, the fae — they're all out there, everywhere.

But the really weird shit always starts and ends with the Nephandi. The Dark Mirrors, as some of the more politically correct among us like to say. Fucking demons is what I say. And their shit is smooth as glass. They're charming, they're sexy, and they'll sacrifice you to something ugly just as soon as look at you. Zydeco and I have devoted everything we are to wiping these miserable puss-bags off the face of the cosmos. And that's no mean trick, considering I still have a day job. Read on, friend.





7/18/96:

Every road I take leads me back to Card Farnel. When I hooked up with the Zydeco Jones show, I had so many questions. Why Card? Why these people? What the hell am I gonna tell my wife? Who the fuck was that guy in the suit anyway? Petrus and the Doc seemed to be more interested in the fact that they'd found another mage than in Card's death. It was all training and history and tests and secrecy. And Zydeco — she was supposedly Card's girl, or that's what I assumed based on what he'd said to me. The woman made the Arctic look tropical. No emotion, just precision. She was calculus embodied. Nobody seemed to think that Card's death was important. I guess I was hasty to judge. His death was more important than I could even imagine.

Tonight, apparently, I've finally achieved some kind of worthiness. And I don't think they make a bomb big enough to compare to what they dropped on me. Let me see if I can work this out on paper, because right now, it's all boiling around in my head in no particular kind of sense I can make out.

1. Card, Zydeco and Petrus were all initiated members of the Order of Hermes. That's a magical tradition. In that tradition there are houses. Zydeco belongs to House Janissary. Card belonged to House Thig. He and Dr. Ganesh designed the car. Dr. Ganesh is a member of another tradition — the Sons of Ether.

2. The man who killed Card goes by the name of Reginald Wojcik. He is something called a Nephandus — a mage dedicated to the path of chaos and evil as opposed to what we do (which is also chaotic and smells of every kind of evil that I've ever read about). Anyway. Normally we would leave the Nephandi (plural) alone unless they came knocking on our door. However, this Reginald Wojcik guy used to be a member of the Order. What's more, he and Petrus were students together at someplace called Doiasstep (I think I spelled that right). This place is in some kind of never-land called the horizon realms. I still don't quite understand how those realms exist compared to our own reality, but then again, there's a lot I don't quite understand. Zy-dee says it'll all come in time. Tangent — got to focus.



3. Wojcik has stolen things – objects, talismans, books, etc. – that belong to the Order, and worse yet, he knows how these things work. Now that he's joined the Dark Side, he's extremely dangerous.

4. As a Janissary, it is Zydeco's job, bounden duty and purpose to hunt this guy down, retrieve the stolen goods and put a permanent end to him and any followers he might have. Petrus was instructed to act as a counsel and guide to her, since this guy was old and crafty. Dr. Ganesh was brought on board because of her work with correspondent (?) travel. Card was Zy-dee's friend, her lover, her partner. The Q to her Bond. He made the gadgets work.

5. The operation works like this: Petrus sets up a system for magical hits. Money, a photograph, an address and some object or two that the mark recently handled, all to go into an unmarked mailbox on some deserted stretch of road (there are a total of 150 mailboxes in about 25 countries). Zydeco and partner (that now seems to be me, by default) travel in the custom El Camino from Hell to check the boxes. If there's a hook, we take it and hunt the mark until he, she or it leads us in the direction we want to go. No questions, no paper trail, no evidence. Nothing but people and things that are better off dead. Unfortunately, there was a hitch in the plan. Someone marked Wojcik. Maybe Wojcik marked himself. But the end result is that he's on to us, and he killed Card as a warning and a lesson. This is just huge. Anyway, it's almost time for me to get back to Morgan and the mundane life. I used to think that being married and working as an architect was a great thing, the culmination of my life and happiness. Now, they just seem...ordinary. That hurts.

Still with me? You've probably made the same realization that I did back then. Once you've Awakened, it's really hard to go back to the wife and the job and not drive yourself out of your tree with boredom. I mean, would you choose a piss-boy job in a high-profile architectural firm and quiet married life in a suburb (where the most excitement you'll ever see is your neighbor's less than immaculately pruned shrubbery) over a secret life where you drive

fast, magical cars and tote sci-fi/fantasy weapons in a cosmic crusade against evil?

The choice is obvious, and yet, you just can't let go of it. The life you had as a Sleeper is a safety net. You think that no matter how bad it gets out there in your "other" life, you can come back to the safety and comfort of who and what you were before. And in a way, you can. I mean, it's not absolutely imperative that you sever all ties to family and friends and work. Some sorcerers manage to keep the two sides of themselves completely separate and apart. If you ever figure out how to do this, show me how. Because, the rest of us suffer from bleed-over — those times when the magic won't stay put in its little toy box and it gets out to wreak havoc on your job, your reputation, everything. Look here.

12/22/97:

Well. It was bound to happen someday. I got called in to see Dean, my boss. He's the man I work for but have never seen, the man whose last name hangs suspended in large metal letters over the entryway to my office suite and under which I walk every day. Dean's the man whose mediocre designs I'm responsible for cleaning up. You don't get called in to see Dean unless you've made an appointment or you're getting fined. So, since I haven't made an appointment, I can only assume that by tomorrow lunchtime, I'll be out of a job.

And it's no wonder. I've been at this insane double-life game for almost two years now. How can I keep up with work when I'm out to all hours of the night tracking down demons with Senorita Miente, and plagued by tall dark and brooding when I actually do manage to get to sleep? Used to be that I wished for the dreams to just stop. Now that I'm living the dream, the Man is hounding me more than ever. It's like I lose myself after he shows up. And when Morgan — bless her, I love her — wakes me up with my morning coffee, I've designed houses and skyscrapers and entire cities, the likes of which have never existed on this or any other planet.

But I knew I couldn't keep up the pace for very long. I knew I'd hit a breaking point. It didn't dawn on me that I'd given Dean the wrong plans until half hour ago when I sat down at the drawing table and



saw blueprints for a split level ranch house where my dream-drawing ought to have been. At first, I panicked. But then something inside told me to just chill. Didn't I deserve a better shake than the one I was getting? I had to do something to liven up my otherwise boring mundane life. So I am currently chilling – thanks to a large scotch and soda – and waiting for Zydeco to call. At least I'll have something to keep my mind off of my imminent unemployment.

12/23/97:

I don't believe this. I am now a partner. A senior member of Coleman, Skal & Spantus. Of course, now it's Coleman, Skal, Spantus & Cody. I don't believe this. Morgan is still on the phone, calling everyone she knows, telling them how her husband has finally become a big-time architect. I'm still trying to figure out how this happened. I mean, sure, I've dropped hints over the past year that perhaps my name should be hanging in block print over the door, that perhaps I had more creative talent in my little finger than Coleman, Skal & Spantus combined. I mean, I'm really good at what I do, but... well... The things I design – freaky Bedouin-inspired cityscapes aside – aren't what you would call status-quo. In school, they called me Roark – as in Howard Roark, as in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, as in the architect whose designs were so bizarre that he had a hell of a time making anything but a failure of himself. I was all set to accept my ultimate defeat, suck it up and get fired. Instead, this happens.

So what are the odds? I mean, what are the odds that I'd accidentally give Dean my wild drawings instead of the plans for a house? What are the odds that an old, backwards thinking Mayor would chance to see my fast-forward designs and suddenly decide that what his city needs is a face-lift, a new, un-copied, futuristic look to its buildings and public places?

It's absurd! I mean, I'll admit that I've allowed myself to imagine my designs fleshed out in glass and steel. I'll admit I tried to infuse them with the same kind of rush and energy I felt the first night my dream life became reality. But I never expected this! Behold the power of positive thinking!

## SECRET IDENTITY MAN!

Keeping the magical and mundane lives separate sounds like a great idea. You don't need to tell your significant other about the magic, right? Or your parents? Or your teachers, employers...

As anyone who's ever been a teenager knows, these things have a way of getting out. That's why it's imperative for your **Mage** character to have a background and history right from the start. We've said it before, and it bears repeating: Your mage is more than just a collection of dots. How your character's family and friends react to her secrets can be a big part of a chronicle — a story unto itself.

Check out the questions about your mage's background, but then try these little spins.

- If your friends/family know about your character's magic, how long have they known? People who've just been jumped into the magical world tend to be a lot more panicky and active than those who've had a chance to let it sink in. Furthermore, establish at what point in your character's career his cover was blown. **Initiates of the Art** describes some situations in which

an aspiring mage may have to come to terms with his family. However, a disciple has far more interesting questions to answer if he is suddenly found out. "You've had all these powers for how long now?"

- If your family *doesn't* know, how do you hide it? Aside from Resonance, which people will feel anyway, you can expect those late nights and long trips to be noticed. Especially if you show up with the strange burn-marks of Paradox Backlash!

- Delving into your mage's family isn't all bad. After all, family is there through thick and thin, right? (Unless you have some sort of nasty brutish family, which would probably count as a Flaw.) Therefore, there's actually an *advantage* to detailing your mage's family. When the chips are down, you may well be able to go to them for a little help, or at least a hot meal.

- Family members are the *perfect* justification for picking up new Backgrounds such as *Allies*. Your family members could functionally become consors. Some might learn sorcery, if you've got the time. Invest in your family, and it'll pay you back.



## NINE TO FIVE AND BACK AGAIN

Although it would appear that messing around with employment is simple enough, it's a common mistake, and one that most mages only make once.

It's easy enough to set events in motion to get a good job, to make money, whatever. A crafty mage can easily pull in large amounts of cash with just sensory Effects. Only three things stop her.

First: The possibility of botching. Rare? Perhaps. Sooner or later, though, the odds catch up. A mage who uses magic to stay ahead of the game, every day, in a regular job, under job stress, is *going* to blow it sooner or later. When that Paradox comes down, chances are it'll whack the mage's new-found income as well as giving her a nice kick in the shins.

Second: Resonance. Once the mage starts a chain with magic, it takes on its own characteristics. A mage with Goopy Resonance can bet that it will show up unpleasantly in her job. In some cases, just getting normal employment may be easier. People tend to notice at this point, too; once the mage's job takes on exaggerated traits, the rep starts to spread. Worse still, most mages can't create a job market for themselves directly. Rather, they just let the magic

loose in a coincidental stream that goes where it will. Guarding the sewage plant may pay the bills but it's not all that entertaining, Sparky.

Third: The Technocracy. Although the Pogrom isn't what it once was, magical meddling in economics does tend to get the attention of the Syndicate. This attention is why more mages don't just cheat on taxes, foresee betting pools or finagle ATMs. The Technocracy *plans* for people to have nice, regular jobs. When a mage comes along and upsets the balance, her Resonance and her often not-so-subtle machinations draw the Technocracy right to her door.

So are there any times that it's worth using magic in conjunction with a job? Certainly. When you're desperate, of course, and you need cash *now*, a little magic goes a long way. Magic is also useful to nudge along an otherwise mundane job. Pushing around a construction job with Time and Forces to speed things up is a bit much, however, augmenting one's skills a little makes it that much easier to get things done. As long as the mage doesn't exert external forces, she can keep the magic contained and avoid the worst problems of her Resonance getting noticed.

More like, behold the power of magic. Friends, it will amaze you how much your life is affected by this stuff. And it's like a drug. Once you figure out how you did it, you'll want to use the gift to tweak just about everything. And that's when you get into trouble. The more you mess with your old, mundane life, the more you make it extraordinary, the less you get out of it. Then,

too, we mages are a strange bunch as a rule. Remember I mentioned that Card Farrel had this weird vibe he put out, that touch of the bizarre? Well, no matter what you try to do to remain normal, some of that strangeness seeps through and rubs off onto everything and everyone we touch. Especially family.

5/1/97:

Morgan has had me followed by a private investigator. I admit, I've given her no reason to believe that I'm *not* having some kind of illicit affair, or at least that I'm not in trouble with the law. What *IS* it about cops, by the way? I think that I've been pulled over for vehicular search at least 10 times this year! And that's when I'm driving the Lexus! Never mind when Zydeco and I are out in the Magemobile. It's like we're donut flavoured flypaper! Anyway, ever since I broke with Coleman and opened up shop for myself, she's been suspicious. So now I've got this sorry excuse for a P.I. clicking away at his camera, content in his belief that I haven't noticed him. It's not that I don't love Morgan. I do. I love her more than anything in any universe, but I can't share this part of myself with her. I can't share the magic. And that puts up a wall between us. She says I never talk to her anymore. And she's right. Because I'm always talking with Zydeco. Zy-dee answers my questions, shows me new ways of working my will, watches my back in a tight spot. Why wouldn't I talk to her, get to know her as well as I possibly could?

It breaks my heart. Morgan thinks I'm on drugs, or in trouble with the Mafia or the feds, or something. She can sense that I'm not the same man she married. And I'm not. Why is it this so hard? Why do I have to watch her go through this? Why do I know that no matter what I say, she'll never be able to hear the real truth?



11/27/97:

My mother knows there's something wrong with me and Morgan. We missed Thanksgiving. More specifically, I missed Thanksgiving, because I was out chatting up some slime-ball vampire named Bruce when I should have been home, getting ready to drive to the family dinner with my wife. Magic crusade wise, it was a great day. The weasel finally broke to pressure. The elemental fire gun I designed for Zydeco didn't hurt matters. Anyway, he spilled his guts and told us where we could start looking for Wojcik's base of operations. It's what we've been searching for from the beginning.

But could I tell Morgan that? No. All I could say was that I got caught up in some work. For the first time in five years of marriage, Morgan isn't sleeping in our bed, and she sure as hell isn't bringing me coffee in the morning anymore. When mom called, I broke down. Told her that there was this side of myself that had been hidden for so long, and now that it was out of hiding, it was taking over my entire life. She said that people change, but that I had to share those changes with my wife. If not, then some sort of sacrifice had to be made. So it's going to stop. Petrus all but demanded I leave Morgan, leave my work and come live outside reality with him and the Mad Doctor. And Zydeco is like a woman possessed. Before Wojcik, there were two things that mattered in her life: Card and the magic. Now there's just one thing that matters: finding Wojcik and scattering his soul to the infinite winds.

I have to admit that I want that too. Want it so bad I can taste it. But not at the expense of everything I am, everyone I love outside this crazy business. Yknow, I honestly wish none of this had ever happened to me. I didn't ask for it. I was fine without it. So, from this point forward, it ends. I'm out of it. They can take this insanity and shove it up their collective asses. Fuck the magic, fuck the Order, just fuck it all.





There may come a time when you burn out like I did. But I'll tell you, that burn out saved my work, my marriage and my life. I shut it all out, even if I couldn't shut it off. As a matter of fact, I realized that it is possible to use magic in my work without letting it overly influence or consume my work.

This is important. I mean, no matter which ways your gift manifests itself, unless you're independently wealthy, you've got to hold down a job. So you either deal with the job you've got, or you find a line of work that compliments the magic, something that meshes well with your new mystic life and the ordinary waking day. Ask others in your Tradition (if you've even got one) what they do to make money and live. Research the kinds of professions others of our ilk hold down. Ask questions, but use caution, because you never know who might be listening and who might just answer. As

it was, I went independent, left the firm and put out my own shingle. Perhaps you will have to go into business for yourself as well. At the very least, you'll only have yourself to answer back to.

So, it's been three years or so and you've got it together. Got the hang of the magic, got a grip on a job and where your next meal is coming from, formed a truce with the rest of the denizens of the Awakened world. Things are pretty tight with you and your loved ones, and life is rumbling along more or less without incident. Then something big happens. Something from out in the deep reaches comes crashing in and disrupts your perfect little balance. I'm talking about the Maelstrom. Like it or not, if you're Awakened this affects you, even if you have no idea where the Horizon Realms are, what the Technocracy is, and why it's agents decided that the folks living in Doissetep had to die.

6/18/98:

*Zydeco Jones hasn't called me in forever. And when she does, the first thing she says is: Petrus is gone.*

*Me: What do you mean, Petrus is gone?*

*Zydeco: I mean, he stepped through the portal to his house in Crete. He never arrived, and he hasn't come back.*

*Me: When was this?*

*Zydeco: Three days after they destroyed Doissetep.*

*Me: They what? Who did?*

*Zydeco: Technocrats. They're gone, Cody. He's gone. All the old Masters are gone. Vanished. Vaporized.*

*We think something's happened to the outer planes. You can't destroy something as big as Doissetep; you can't have that many Awakened souls die without there being some repercussion or other. She wants me to come see her. She's hurt. Tried to use the car in the usual way, jump it through the Gauntlet like we usually do. It almost killed her. This is really bad, really wrong.*

7/9/99:

*Ganesha is the Hindu god that removes all obstacles. Well, all obstacles except one, apparently. Dr. Ganesh disappeared into her beloved ether three days ago, and she hasn't returned. She's gone to be with Petrus, Zydeco said. I can't help but feel helpless. At least she left her notes. That should be some consolation. It occurs to me that I didn't really know her or Petrus. Yes, they trained me, showed me how to use and control the magic, but that was the extent of it. They were isolated into themselves, into their own power, into their own work. There was so much that they had left to teach me. Guess I'll have to teach myself. We'll have to teach ourselves, Zydeco and I.*

*I introduced her to Morgan the other night. Said she was a cousin. The two of them are getting along great, sipping coffee in the kitchen as I write this. I suppose that with Petrus and the Doc gone, Zy-dee and I'll have to pick up the work again. It's a terrifying prospect in a lot of ways. I thought I'd left the demon-chasing days behind in favor of my wife and my career. But we're in a tight spot right now. Now, more than ever, is the time to nip the Nephandi in the bud before they get out of control.*



And that, dear friends, is what I'm still doing. I've picked up the torch and carried on. I know that a lot of you were left adrift on a lawn chair when the shit went down in Horizon, but you can't let that get to you. Just remember to stay the hell out of the spirit Realms, and understand that there isn't anyone left to hold your hand and show you how to make magic. You got to do that for yourself now. You're big boys and girls. We've also got new responsibilities. The Masters are gone, so it's up to us to train Apprentices and newly Awakened souls.

And then it's up to all of us to simply survive. Zydeco and I chase Nephandi for a reason. It's not even about the Janissary trip anymore. It's about a murdered friend whose memory refuses to die. Don't get the idea that this is something everyone should do. Go out and find your own causes. There are things in the cities and suburbs that are just crying out for a mage's touch. You know you can affect things. So why not affect things for the better? Make things a little less dark for the Sleepers. You're the only lights this world has left. Burn.

*Every one of us hopefully understands the need to balance 'real life' with magical practice, but how exactly do you do that? After all, it's one thing to say 'Go out there and have a life,' but quite a few mages fall into the trap of a real disconnection. They get so enamored of magical study, or so afraid of dealing with normal people in light of their Awakening, that they don't know how to mix in everyday living. It's not hard; we're still people, just with a few different angles. So here are a few moments that might help give insight into the special problems we have in 'blending in.' I've asked some acquaintances to relate their own experiences, good and bad, in dealing with things that we might otherwise take for granted.*

— X.

## THE MAGE'S COLLEGIUM

I'd been in my second year of college when I Awakened. Naturally, I was confused as hell, and I didn't know where to turn. I thought that I wanted to finish college, get my degree, find a regular job and so on. I had no "great aspirations" or anything, I just wanted to get on with my life. Awakening was frightening. Suddenly the world changed beneath my feet, so to speak, and I wasn't sure how to deal with it. My friends noticed that I'd changed. I was nervous, twitchy, distracted. Naturally, this didn't help my grades at all.

It took me the better part of a year to actually run into a Tradition mentor. In the meantime, I had to learn things the hard way. I discovered the basics of magic, the ways to concentrate and the power in symbols. Initially, of course, I'd thought I was insane; later I realized that I needed to conceal my capabilities, since history bears out that the masses don't like people they can't understand or control. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man gets lynched.

Anyway, I'd put off visiting my family because I didn't want my parents to think that I'd gotten strung out on drugs or that I'd cracked under academic pressure. I kept in touch a little, but I did the only thing I could think of: I buckled down and redoubled my studies.

At first, magical insight was a hindrance. I was constantly distracted with my new vision of the world, and I was tempted to try to mess with things in little ways. That stopped when I used a little magic to fudge a test for which I hadn't studied, and I accidentally answered a question that the class hadn't reviewed. (The teacher had apparently cut-and-pasted the exam and didn't review it well enough.) Just explaining my way out of that

took several tense hours with an instructor, and it made me all the more certain that I'd keep my head down.

After I'd gotten a little more accustomed to magical things, I started keeping an eye out for other people who might be like me. Academia is full of impressionable minds, but there are also those sorts who don't like change and have their own pet theories. You can't simply ask people in your study group if they've had a mind-altering experience and gained the ability to change the world. You have to be more circumspect than that. So I watched for other students who might seem to have the distraction that I'd first experienced or who had a sudden flash of insight or the like.

It turns out that, although I didn't run into any other students who'd gone through the vision-shift I'd experienced, I did meet a few who embraced occultism and strange ideologies. A college campus is a great place to find fringe elements, due to people who are fired up with new ideas or just bored of mundane living. The real inspiration came from a teacher, though. I'd passed by a class on linguistics, and I stopped to overhear the teacher discussing linguistic symbolism and written forms. Even though I hovered around the back of the class, the instructor seemed to notice me — almost as if the "scent of magic" that made people think of me as weird was something that he could see. I left before the class ended, but he caught up with me later that week when I was at the campus food court getting a quick bite. He asked me some penetrating questions about my curriculum and my thoughts on thinking, and I figured out that he *knew*.

Who'd've thought that you could learn magic in college? It's not on the curriculum, of course, but colleges have access to great resources like libraries,

cultural exchanges and communication facilities like their computer networks. This naturally made it a perfect place for learning not just about my old major (in history) but also about the Traditions, magical theory and occult symbolism. Night classes, so to speak, helped me not only to learn more about magic, but to improve my own study skills and general knowledge, which naturally carried over to other fields. And I discovered that you can couch terms in many ways. My teacher would often hide little bits of magical profundity in the midst of his normal class lectures, as if tossing out bits for those few who might “get it.”

Once I'd finished my degree, I decided to follow in my instructor's footsteps. I finagled a grant — what a coincidence that they should pull my name from the pool of applicants — and finished up a master's degree so that I could start teaching as well. I took up comparative history: I teach students about written history versus perception of history, how to sift fact and motive out of the often-biased reports of historians and how to make connections between disparate events. I don't have an after-hours student yet, but the college is a perfect place to advance my own studies and look for more people like myself.

## THE UNIVERSITY MAGE

As mages pursue learning in many forms, universities and colleges are natural places for them to work. A university library is as great a reference station as any mage's occult library, and the mage can learn about different cultures, rub shoulders with exchange students, develop academic discipline and even make money while filling the heads of impressionable youngsters with the ideals of the Traditions or Conventions.

Mages in university settings occupy many roles. The mage-as-student and mage-as-professor are the most common ideas: A magely student can study both magic and mundane knowledge while the professor has a regular job where he gets to teach and influence people with his beliefs. However, a lot of other roles have potential. How about the mage janitor, who takes the opportunity to see the various up-and-coming students, who works behind the scenes, sabotages enemy magical experiments and holdings, and has access to nearly every part of the campus? Or the mage researcher who doesn't actually do much teaching, but instead gets to use university material to “prove” his magical theories, corresponds through academic journals and has various acolytes (research assistants) who help him with his projects? Or the mage administrator who handles paper-filing; keeps records of students and their grades, interests, special quirks and hobbies; sponsors various clubs or activities that might promote his views; gets grants and loans to just the right people; and who blocks the funding and execution of enemy projects? A multitude of places exists for a mage to fit in.

A university mage should probably have decent ratings in Academics, of course, as well as supplementary skills necessary for the job, such as Linguistics, Expression and Occult. A mage who's a janitor or in the service department needs related skills, such as Security and Technology. Administrators have Leadership, Politics and perhaps Subterfuge. Any mage in

a university has a diverse array of regular Backgrounds as well. Those Backgrounds include: *Allies* (students or teachers), *Contacts* (likewise), *Library* (from special material sections of the university facilities) and *Resources* (from grants, family money or tenure).

A mage who works in a university is likely to specialize in a favored Sphere that ties to the mage's academic interest. A mage-historian would likely use Time magic to look back into events of interest, while a psychology teacher would use Mind magic, and an engineer might use Matter. Often, due to the specialized nature of academia, such mages become Adepts or Masters in one favored Sphere while retaining only rudimentary skill in others, although such is not always the case.

So what can you do on campus? It depends on what you want to achieve. Akashic Brothers are natural as martial-arts instructors, but they are also philosophy professors, athletic coaches (teaching Do to the football team, perhaps?), Asian culture and history professors, religion students or members of meditation, poetry, hiking and similar clubs.

The Celestial Chorus isn't just limited to seminary. Choristers also study history and philosophy, dive into the sciences to reconcile faith with science, study music and work as counselors and boosters. Cultists of Ecstasy have no trouble finding campus parties and people willing to go “all the way,” but they also teach in matters of perception (such as neurology) or work as alumni sponsoring campus organizations — like the fraternities that host their parties. They even run help centers for addiction or sexual-assault victims.

Dreamspeakers seem natural to teach culture and anthropology, but they are also interested in archeology; wilderness travel groups for rafting, hiking and getting back to nature; dance and music classes; even modern street culture for techno-shamans.



Euthanatoi seem to gravitate toward medical and philosophical professions, as well as discussions on ethics or warfare. They also appear on review boards or even as campus police. It's no joke; justice on *any* scale is important.

Mages of the Order of Hermes are easily the most common Tradition one would find in an academic environment. Their Chantry often have a very "university feel" to them, and the Hermetics take study very seriously indeed. Hermetic mages are often professors in fields like language and history, but a Hermetic mage could also easily be a university administrator who oversees student progress, a perpetual student academic, an instructor in material chemistry, a physicist who works in force dynamics or an astronomer.

Sons of Ether naturally fit into a university in physics and engineering departments, but what about the parapsychology researcher, the disbursements administrator who has a whole storeroom full of weird and wonderful tools or the travel coordinator who arranges for trips to places like nuclear power plants and foreign countries?

Verbena seem like naturals in horticulture and life sciences but they also promote student health and sexuality clinics, teach life sciences or arrange alternative-religion foundations.

Of course, the Virtual Adepts excel in high-technology campuses, where they can be network administrators, computer science teachers, researchers in cutting-edge engineering fields, student info trackers, database managers or even owners of video game arcades.

This variety points up a very important fact: Technocrats aren't the only mages who can be scientists. Your Dreamspeaker can just as easily be a researcher or teacher at a university as any Iterator or Progenitor. Indeed, in an entire cabal based out of a university, odds are that at least one or two Tradition mages study various scientific or engineering disciplines intensely.

The Technocracy naturally has a vested interest in universities, too. After all, its best and brightest minds come out of such institutions. A Technocrat of nearly any Convention could work as a teacher or administrator in a university, and many ranking Technocrats do just that. Universities make great covers for Technocratic facilities, ranging from super-advanced health care clinics to experimental power, material and computer technologies. The New World Order monitors academic standards carefully to make sure that schools teach the "right" curriculum, while Syndicate agents cover the finances of promising students or wreck the academic careers of their enemies through blacklisting.

A mage's enemies at a university are likely to be other mages. Very important universities are often hotbeds of magely conflict, especially when they double as centers of study and development for mage groups. A university with a Technocratic research station will almost certainly attract the notice of a few Traditionalists who would want to co-opt it, study it or shut it down. However, Tradition and Convention mages can sometimes even get along in university atmospheres: The higher calling as seekers of truth is underscored especially in universities, and there are many different ways of looking at any situation, which means that the occasional compromise is inevitable.

Besides just mage adversaries, though, universities offer other groups that might hinder a mage. Student groups could find a mage teacher too harsh, prejudiced or undereducated in modern sciences, and push for the teacher's dismissal. Bitter academic rivals quash theories in one another's journal articles while jockeying for tenure and position at the university. Unscrupulous researchers may taint or destroy the work of others, and that sabotage can be especially dangerous when the mage is working with magical energies that could get out of control. Parent groups or standards investigators might be concerned about a mage who teaches occultism or strange theories to his students, and such groups would certainly try to curtail the activities of groups like the Cult of Ecstasy. More prejudicial campuses might restrict students to a certain ethnicity (this is the World of Darkness, after all, where affirmative action is just another oppressive tool) or religion, and a mage could have his work cut out for him trying to integrate new, radical ideas. There's no shortage of obstacles to overcome.

Using magic in a university setting is a chancy proposition, but it is also a rewarding one. Unlike a mage in big business or everyday city life, a university mage has some flexibility simply due to the openness of many students' minds. Accepting new ideas and curious ways to accomplish strange things, students and academics often let mages get away with some unusual Effects that would otherwise be crushed by Unbelief. This isn't to say that a mage can perform godly feats coincidentally, but an eloquent mage who expounds on his theories and uses some materials that seem to make sense could very well perform some tricks more coincidentally than normal. Of course, the mage must watch out for the occasional skeptic or narrow-minded academic, but that's the price of often having greater freedom of magical technique.



## A LITTLE MIND-BROADENING TRAVEL

Since I've been lurking about making comments on the rest of this book, I might as well introduce myself and say something useful. I'm called Xoca — like I'm going to tell you my real name, right — and mostly I travel. Some people say I'm a terrorist. I think I'm justified in what I do, but hey, once you're a mage you find out that the whole world is crazy, and old standards just don't apply, right?

Anyway, I came from Central America, and I still live there. I spend time on the road traveling around South and Central America, dealing with locals and helping out in little ways. I use my medicine to heal poor people, help with rural farming and give advice to people stuck living in squalid cities. I also tend to the forests and jungles, visit the old sites of ancient cities and try to glean wisdom from the natural world. Overall it's not a bad life if you don't mind spending much of it cramped in a jeep or sleeping under the stars on this mountainside or that jungle bed. I get to accomplish a lot, and I can chat with the animals and the people who've stayed close to nature. It can be a tough life, but it's rewarding.

Travel has quite a few advantages. Since I'm on the road most of the time, the Technocracy doesn't have any way to trace me or slap me down in a specific location. I don't own a house, so they can't come knocking at my non-existent door — which is good, considering how much damage I tend to do to them when I run across their mind-numbing, ecology-destroying “development projects.” If they start breathing down my neck, I just head into the wilds for a few weeks and pop out in some flyspeck village that's beneath their notice. It works; they haven't caught me yet.

I also get to meet a *lot* of people. I've learned at least a dozen dialects during my trips, and, although there's a lot of poverty and suffering out there, I've met many genuinely caring and helpful people. They don't always understand me, but it's worth it for the few who do and who still believe in the spirits. These days, I can walk or ride into any number of places and expect a warm reception. Plus, I've had the chance to do a lot of learning — more than I would at any “civilized” school. There's no substitute for raw brush experience. Although my early travels were hindered by my ignorance, now I can hunt, I can track, I know what hazards to avoid in the jungle. I can drive anything from a bicycle to a heavy military truck, I know how to set and disarm explosives, and I've heard more stories, legends and occult ideas than any other three mages I've ever met. I know the



locations of at least half a dozen natural Nodes, and I can point out a multitude of spirits, places of power and signs of legendary creatures. The more you get out there and mess around with the world, the more you get to see the supernatural side that's been hiding all of your pre-magical life.

On the flip side, the traveling lifestyle's disadvantages are as prominent as its advantages. Without a regular home, I don't have a regular income. I have to survive on the generosity of people, with the odd jobs I can take and with what I can make for myself or steal from Technocratic operatives. Getting lost can be a problem — I found that out when I went haring off after a rumor of some sort of talking great eagle in the jungles, and I didn't get out for a month and a half (empty-handed, too). Although I can often win the trust of people by helping them out, I have to make sure to learn local customs and to put their fears at ease. Not everyone feels comfortable around the medicine man from the jungle, after all, especially when he accidentally makes some sort of *faux pas* with a local custom in a way that says, "Your mother blows river oxen." I also don't travel with a group, which means that I have to be totally self-sufficient — which is real hell if I get sick or injured. And, of course, I don't have a regular library or mentor or anything. I have to improve my magical skills and learn new techniques where and when I can. That's why I spend a lot of my travel time uncovering old ways from the ruins in Central America.

The traveling lifestyle just isn't as common today as it once was. People don't trust vagabonds or strangers without identification. Me, I'm sure that it's part and parcel of the Technocracy's plan to order humanity. It's a little easier if you have real money: A family or group of friends taking an RV across the country draws a lot less negative attention than some bum wandering into town (especially a *weird* bum, as I've mentioned before). Since you don't always stay in one place long enough for people to get to know you really well, you don't have as much of an opportunity to make enemies. Just hope that you don't walk into the middle of something nasty. Clint Eastwood may have survived *A Fistful of Dollars*, but strangers who wind up trucking into an unpleasant local situation may find themselves on the receiving end of some rather hostile notice.

The more you travel, the more you'll run into little places that the world left behind — villages of cannibals, small-town Americana that's still in the sixties, little areas where everyone's related or they're all part of some cult. The further afield you get, the more likely you are to run into one of these isolated oddities, and we mages

seem to run into them more often than most. Best bet? Expect that *something* totally fucked up will happen in each place that you travel to, and stay prepared to move on if it's outside your depth.

## BIG BUSINESS!

You wouldn't expect a mage in a power tie and classy suit, right? Cell phones, fax machines and memos are the tools of the Technocracy, aren't they? Well, I'll tell you, there are worse lives to live.

Think about it. If we're going to do any good, we have to get people to accept us and our magic. They have to want to believe, and they have to see that what we offer is positive. You think people are going to accept that from some squalid transient who shows them parlor tricks while begging for change? Not likely. I know how to survive in the modern world, and I make it work for me instead of pointlessly rejecting it. I've been called a sell-out and worse, but the fact is that I get things done. I spread the message of the Traditions, and I have the influence and money to live well, all at the same time.

My name's Maria, and I'm one of the Verbena. The people at the office who call me a witch behind my back are a little more right than they know, although not completely. See, just because I believe in the Verbena principles and the power of life doesn't mean that I automatically *can't* believe in six-figure incomes, the power of advertising and using your business clout to make the world better. I hear that woman Lee Ann spends some time volunteering in a soup kitchen. Well, I contributed over six hundred thousand dollars to various charities last year through my business, and I still have time to promote Tradition idealism through business advertising and financial choices.

So, I'll give you a little advice. Working in the business world isn't easy as being a mage, but it's doable, and it has some real benefits.

First off, you need a proper education. Modern science and economics may be "tools of technology," but they are the way things get done. You can't bury your head in the sand and pretend that they don't exist or aren't applicable. So, suck it up and learn them, even if you don't believe. Chalk it up to "know thine enemy" if you must. Get a degree and slide into an internship program so that you have a corporate "in" going for you. Chances are that a little magic from there will nudge you into a good position. Don't count on just landing a high-powered executive job solely by magic, though. You need to put in the work to actually do the job. Besides, if you're going to turn the position to your advantage, you'll need to know how to manipulate the business.



## THE TRAVELING CHRONICLE

A travel-oriented chronicle can be difficult to pull off. The Storyteller must do a lot of work to establish new characters in each new location, to build interesting stories that don't necessarily mesh and to keep the players curious in every new setting. Such chronicles tend to be episodic: A single story of three or four games covers developments in one location, after which the players' mages move on to somewhere else. The stories can be told at specific sites, or they can recount the adventures of traveling itself. Many heroes have met dangers on the road just as compelling as the problems they faced once they arrived at their destinations!

Mages usually need a reason to travel. There are serious bonuses to having a settled lifestyle, specifically in the form of easy access to magical resources. Once you know where a Node is, why would you leave it behind? Why move on if you've got a good teacher? Just the motive for a traveling game can be important.

Is the group fleeing some enemy? Is it seeking some unknown goal or location, like a powerful Node, a Shallowing, a natural gate, a place to live in peace or whatever, without knowing exactly where it is? Are the characters under some geas that prevents them from staying in one place for too long? Are they broadening their early experience so they can find settled places to live later? Often, the things that mages look for aren't on any map, so you can simply drive the direction of travel with a few well-placed rumors, some divinatory magic or just the whims of the mages themselves.

On the upside, a traveling game offers the opportunity to see a lot of different aspects of the World of Darkness. Instead of marrying the game to a settled theme, the story can showcase the element-of-the-week as the players' characters grapple with whatever is the current local problem. Plus, mage characters rise from just about any stock. Every Tradition or Convention could conceivably have traveling members, and mages who move from place to place are likely to be quite eclectic. This setup is perfect if you want to play a mage who doesn't fit in with the rest of his Tradition, who holds odd ideas or who just doesn't get along with other mages outside his cabal. Instead of dealing constantly with the problems of integrating unpleasantly with other

mages, the traveling mage gets to see the world and study at his own pace without interference from an oppressive Master or scornful local mage populace. If something is a problem in one story, you can leave it behind in the next. Say the mages wind up scoring a decisive unforeseen advantage with a vampire ally; once they move on, the ally stays behind and isn't a problem. Traveling games also accommodate the addition and removal of new players quite nicely. The mages can pick up a friend in a new place, or leave someone behind for a while.

Obviously, a *single* traveling mage doesn't always work well in a settled chronicle, but it's possible to use one nonetheless. A mage with significant Correspondence or Spirit magic may just "show up" whenever his cabal has some sort of adventure. It's also possible for a mage to use a given town as a base of operations, from which he travels, but to which he always returns. The lone wolf can draw suspicion from the rest of the group, but such a character is also a great way to introduce new elements. Those elements include enemies who follow the character, a Wonder that the mage brings back with him from some destination, a new ally or student and news of special events in some distant locale. Just be careful not to use the traveling character as the lynchpin for *all* neat new things. The characters who are centered have significant advantages in the form of a Node, a Chantry or a library, and they should reap the benefits of these settled resources.

Individual traveling mages usually don't have many Backgrounds. It's hard to have regular resources or a potent library when you don't have a job or a place to store huge amounts of books. On the other hand, a mage who does have a potent Background can make for an interesting story hook. If your mage travels a lot but has significant resources, how does he make his money? Did he inherit it? Did he win the lottery? Is he on a pension? Does your mage store all of his accumulated Hermetic knowledge in a single box on a digital DVD-ROM? Does your mage just "happen" to have the ability to home in on minor Nodes wherever he goes, instead of knowing about one specific place of power? The Storyteller should alter a Background to fit the needs of the traveling character, and doing so makes for interesting new ways to look at the individual.



Once you're on the inside, you'll have to learn about office politics. You thought the Traditions were mean... people will always find ways to screw each other over for personal gain. The fact that mages stand out as unusual and different doesn't help. Turn it to your advantage by getting noticed for your strengths, instead of commented on for your differences. If you dabble in lots of Life magic, play up your *joie de vivre* and your no-sick-days record. If you specialize in the Sphere of Matter, make note of your "artistic sensibilities" or "feel for product." The point is to turn your differences into advantages. People will gun for your position, shoot down your ideas to promote their own or just clash over personalities. This competitiveness is nothing new if you've been in the Traditions, but it's noteworthy just the same.

Assuming you've gotten this far, you have succeeded in building a decent position for yourself. Now you just have to make sure that you're in a position to do what you want. If you think that the world would be a better place if everyone had an orange left-handed spanner, then you'd best make sure you're in a company that makes orange left-handed spanners. You can shoot for such a job right from the start, but that's often *not* the best way to go about things. You'll want to gain business experience first. Nothing they teach in business school will prepare you for the reality, so you should consider your first job the chance to learn by botching up. Once

you've done that and finally figured out how the business world works, *then* you can switch over to a job where you can do some good.

"Some good" is going to depend on your individual definitions, of course. There are a couple of positions that are especially noteworthy, though. Advertising is a great way to promote your ideals, and you can do so by sneaking your message into ads for your company. For instance, I tend to build my ads around holistic, natural scenes. Take one of those surreal cologne commercials, but stick it in a rain forest, and you get the idea. Not only is this a slick ad, but it promotes in peoples' minds the trendiness of back-to-nature and of sweaty, sexy beautiful people. Sounds silly, but when thousands of people see it, there's a chance that at least a few will really buy into it enough to like what they see and want more. That's enough to make an impact on their lives, even if it's just in a little way.

Outside advertising, you've got product design, where I suppose Sons of Ether would excel. They say that the job of selling something is just convincing the mark that he needs it, whatever it is. If you've got some hot idea for something that goes hand-in-hand with your Tradition (be it the Junior Occultist's Cookbook or the Super Computer Web Browser Plug-In), you need only convince people that it's something they need, and *voila*. Again, most people won't "get it," but a few might, and they're the ones we do this for.



In addition to handling advertising, I do executive work and PR. Most large companies run charitable works or look for ways to get good press. You can turn this need to your advantage by taking control of the company's assets in that regard. Frankly, unless the CEO has an agenda, he doesn't care whether his check goes to UNICEF or the Save the Rainforests fund, as long as it's deductible and good for positive press. Finagle yourself into directing such projects, and you can get a lot of money funneled right where it's needed.

Some companies also host special projects, such as blood drives, charity auctions, construction assistance, flood relief and disaster aid. You can organize these efforts, too. Say that you want a particular cemetery cleaned up so the ghosts there stop bothering people; you can make it a charitable event that your company sponsors. You get kudos for getting the company good press, your supernatural problem is solved, and you didn't even have to use any magic.

That brings up the subject of using magic in the business world. You obviously can't just whip out the ritual knife in the midst of a meeting; I know I sure can't. But you can make preparations. A lot of business work can be done at home, especially with modern telecommuting and home offices (as I'm sure all you Virtual Adepts know). While you're at home, you can do whatever you need to put the whammy on your project. If you need to guarantee that your proposal gets a fair shake, spend an hour or so at home giving it a "psychic impression" that'll make it more likely to fly. Juggle some numbers and use your intuitive insight to make good projections for the company; it's not all that hard. Just *don't* try to get away with magic in the office unless you're desperate.

First, magic usually doesn't "take" for a long duration unless you build it up. Chances are, you'll make a nice Effect that does what you need, only to find out that it fizzled out before your project or proposal got through all the necessary reviews. Second, the Technocracy is unavoidable in business. The Syndicate has people in positions in most major money-makers (and money-losers; if you want to figure that one out, brush up on your economics) and it *will* eventually catch the whiff of your magic if you are blatant enough to use it in the office. It's best to stay safe. You were using the company to do your mundane work after all, right?

Take my advice and you'll do fine, barring a stock catastrophe or a sudden managerial changeover. And, really, there's little as satisfying as making good money while you promote the values that you think are important. Doing a job you love, and all that.

## THE BUSINESS-ORIENTED MAGE

Finance, Politics and Leadership — these Traits are naturally the underpinnings of a mage in the business world. Perhaps more than any other sort of professional mage, a business(woman) can't afford to rely on magical intervention. Therefore, he needs the abilities to really back up his job. This necessity also calls for good Intelligence and Manipulation scores, as well as high Charisma for PR types. These mages also have strong material Backgrounds, such as *Resources*, *Allies* and *Influence*, plus attendant certifications (see the Appendix) in some cases.

On the down side, a mage who works in the business world is often labeled a sell-out by other Traditionalists. Young Tradition mages sometimes get so caught up in their view of the Traditions as anti-modern societies that they think there's no room for mages who embrace modern institutions. This image can seriously hurt a mage's status and standing with his peers. Furthermore, the business world ticks to a fast schedule; mages with regular jobs may not have the time to indulge in all sorts of adventurous pastimes. Lastly, mages who get caught up in the profit margins and rigorous schedules can get lost in banal bureaucracy. It's hard to strive for Ascension when your attention is focused on the bottom dollar. Mages risk losing the road to Ascension in exchange for a few bucks — not a good trade by any stretch. (Syndicate Technocrats are another matter, but that's because they've built an entire metaphysic around money.)

If your chronicle or story centers on a given business, though, there are still quite a few things to do. Perhaps the most entertaining is the start-up. The mages are a group of friends who decided to start their own business, and they promote their own product or service. Since they run everything, they can pick their schedules and even get away with a little magic at work. However, they also have the most to lose if the business collapses or gets co-opted by the Technocracy. Mages who just work in a larger business run into the troubles of office politicking, Technocratic intervention and mundane mortal authorities. The mage might find out that his boss is engaging in illegal business practices, or he might wind up in the midst of a federal trade investigation!

And just because a mage is in big business doesn't mean that there's never any action. As movies like

*Rising Sun* and *The Firm* show, intrigue can lead to crime, murder, international mystery and more. Mage characters may wind up traveling to uncover clues about hidden operations, dig around for the motives of their colleagues or stumble across a business conspiracy that puts their lives in danger. Remember, even a mage paper-pusher often winds up on the strange side of things, which makes him likely to attract all the *interesting* developments in the company.

So, what would the Traditions do in big business? Akashic Brothers are unlikely to wind up in such a position simply due to their anti-materialistic tendencies, but anything's possible. Coordinating a corporate fitness program and keeping the company's records fall into their purview.

Celestial Choristers work in businesses that promote faith (Bible publishers and the like), but they also appear in nearly any business that cares about and takes care of its customers.

Cultists don't often fit into the rigorous business mold, either, but some head up small, revolutionary start-up companies or work as advertisers or testers for ground-breaking ideas. These Cultists come up with extreme advertising campaigns or new directions for product-development and placement. (Of course, some run porn studios, as well, but that notion has become rather cliché in turn-of-the-century Cultist circles.)

Many Dreamspeakers serve as environmental consultants, managers for businesses run by their home cultures, and translators (or legal aides) in cultural matters.

Euthanatoi make excellent stock brokers with their command of Entropy, of course, and they also work in charity organizations or businesses devoted to medical or legal ends. Many in the legal profession fight for the right for patient euthanasia or promote awareness of illness and health issues.

Order of Hermes mages, with their rigorous mental training, make great businessmen with closet occult streaks, especially those of House Fortuna. Members of House Thig also apply their unique understanding to the ever-developing field of technology.

Although Son of Ether inventions are not always reproducible, many Sons sponsor businesses that build

and distribute fantastic devices in attempts to gain mass-market acceptance. Others work in the R&D sections of more liberal or forward-thinking companies.

Verbena sneak into corporations in nearly any capacity. Look over at your co-worker and determine if she's a pagan, Wiccan or what-have-you. A quiet Verbena can apply her talents easily to companies that promote healthy living, sexual aids, natural products or even blood banks.

And, of course, Virtual Adepts who mature tend to direct their energies in computer and engineering companies where they set up information resources, do consumer surveys, build protection from outside hackers, design web pages and do a little bit of maverick high-speed computer wizardry on the side.

Technocratic affiliations with the business world are almost too numerous to list. Syndicate agents are the natural choice, but other Technocrats exist in the business world, too. After all, *someone* must design and build their incredible inventions!

Iterators work in factories and design labs where they produce more useful tools and products — cars, computers, plastics, metal alloys, industrial machinery, you name it — for the Union to disseminate. Progenitors make designer drugs and new medical devices for use in hospitals, pharmaceutical firms and their usual concerns. The Void Engineers release technology tuned by space-age experimentation. New World Order operatives oversee security and media.

The real stinger comes in how the groups may cross over. Since the Technocracy works as a coherent group (most of the time), a lot of exchange takes place between Conventions. For instance, Progenitors might work in the aerospace-oriented firm to discover the effects of extended space travel on humans, while Void Engineers design means to build tailored drugs in weightless environments. For a good guideline on when to cross specialties among the Technocracy, take a Conventioneer and stick him in a role that would seem more suited to another Convention at first glance. Then, justify how and why he'd be in that role. You'll find that there are more combinations of Technocrats than just the easy, cookie-cutter molds.

## THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

For someone who really wants to serve — someone who wants to make things better for people, in groups and as individuals — there's only the path of the healer. By my definition, a healer is someone who sacrifices his own

needs and desires to ease the pain of others. It's that simple. You give up your life in exchange for those of other people.

I'm no doctor or psychiatrist. I don't deal with liposuction, Valium or any quick-and-dirty solutions. I'm a paramedic, and I work in trauma cases and danger zones. Every day I'm up to my elbows in viscera trying



to save someone's life, to staunch this bleeding or that hemorrhage, to make a difference in just one life. I patch up pieces and end the suffering. Sometimes, when it's too much, I just ease the pain and let it all go.

Make no mistake, the path of the healer isn't for everyone. You have to watch people suffer and die, and sometimes you can't do a thing about it. You'll have to make desperate choices about who you save and how much you'll give up to make things right. It'll break you if you let it, and it is *never* easy.

There's only so much that I can tell you about being a healer. It takes a strong will and a stronger stomach. You'll find plenty of opportunities to use a little magic in addition to all the mundane skills that you can muster, but you'll still lose from time to time.

In short, don't take this path unless you're ready to give up everything to help other people. Bring with you the expectation that you *will* lose eventually and that it may cost you your sanity.

Are you dissuaded yet? No? If you really think you have what it takes, then good for you — the first few months of real trauma will tell.

So, now you've heard the anti-recruitment speech that most doctors and EMTs get. What you need to know from me is how being a healer impacts being a mage.

Since being a healer is about sacrifice, you'll find that you never have enough magic to go around. Paradox and Resonance make it tough enough to use magic, and there's always someone who needs just a little more help than you can safely give. If you dive in and save them, you'll blow yourself apart; if you don't, you'll fall prey to the knowledge that you could've done more. Neither one is healthy for you emotionally.

Worse still, if you let it be known that you have that special touch, people will hound you for it. You'd think that people would respect a healer and let him practice his trade, give him room to use his talents and offer thanks for special skills when you nudge things along with magic. The problem is that you'll run out eventually, and you won't be able to save someone. When that happens, you'll get the blame, and it'll be all the worse because of the heightened expectations. Even normal doctors get malpractice suits and attacks from angry relatives when they fail to save someone in spite of their best efforts. If you get a reputation as having some special, miraculous quality that lets you heal people and pull them back from the brink of death, you'll find yourself looking at an angry horde the first time you fail to uphold that reputation.

Furthermore, the way that most of us do magic doesn't exactly mesh well with modern medicine. Sure,



I can bend fate with a proper spin of the Wheel of Fortune, but that's not a recognized medical treatment. You'll get everything from accusations of quackery to legal investigations. Be careful! Your magic will let you save more people, but it's also a terrible risk. This risk is most manifest in the Technocracy. The Progenitors hardly believe that our treatments are valid, and they consider "degenerate homeopathy" a threat to health. They may not know any better, but that ignorance won't stop them from shutting you down. Of course, the ways they'll stop you range from just taking away your ability to practice to arranging a quick trip for you to the organ bank. As a donor.

Most important, though, is the notion of sacrificing your enlightenment. Healing is a noble cause, but it's one that takes up all your energy. You won't have time to study magic or advance your understanding of the cosmos when you're too busy patching people up. I know

that I'll never be a Master myself. I may manage to get a strong understanding of Life magic just from practice in the field, but it's no substitute for formal training. Field study is useful, to be sure, but it's not the same.

And let's face it, the Ascension road is inherently selfish. It's about overcoming *your* problems and *your* inadequacies and resolving *your* place in the world. That may mean discovering compassion and sacrifice and finding room for other people, but spending all your hours solving other peoples' problems doesn't give you much time to fix your own.

My advice? Unless you've got a severe cosmic debt or a driving need to help, leave the healer's work to others. We fight a nastier war than anyone else, and inevitably, we lose. So do what you can, but remember that if you decide to take this road, you're giving up *everything* to heal the wounds of the world.

And your work's never going to be done.

## THE MAGE AS HEALER

Naturally, a mage character who does work as a healer needs Medicine and Science Abilities, and he stands in good stead with Expression (for bedside manner) and Academics (for classical studies). Backgrounds for such a mage vary. An EMT or paramedic does not have the resources of a doctor, but just about any medical practitioner needs the *Certification* Background (see the Appendix). Medical characters focus primarily on Mental Attributes, such as high Perception for diagnosis, Intelligence for treatment and Wits for rapid-response trauma care. Life and Mind magic are, of course, the primary magical skills necessary.

A mage who's a full-time doctor is probably not the best idea for a character. Such a character's time is rather limited, and extracurricular activities get curtailed. A better idea is to portray a mage who works "on call" as a medical specialist, taking only certain types of cases (heart problems, psychological specialties and so on). This way, the mage still has time for mystical stories, but he can get involved in the affairs of the medical community occasionally as well. Hospital politics are just as intense as those that exist at any other sort of job. Plus, the stress of patients with unusual symptoms or wounds ("Looks like he was bitten by a vampire!") or those who present a moral dilemma to the mage ("This guy supports the Technocracy, but we can't just let him die...") always make intriguing and powerful stories. Any number of stories can be introduced easily just

by the regular rotation of patients and their problems through a hospital.

A mage psychologist or psychiatrist occupies a very special position. Given a place of trust by the patient and the expectation of solving the patient's mental difficulties through exploration of ideas and emotions, the mage can easily bring up Tradition concepts as part of therapy. Although doing so might arguably be a breach of trust, every therapist brings some of his own personal prejudices to the job, and mages are no different. If she convinces someone that he's *not* crazy because he believes in magic, or that he really can better himself through a certain regimen, the mage has turned one more mind on to the path of the Traditions.

Mage healers come in many forms, from homeopathic doctors to acupuncturists, exercise and physical therapists, surgeons and EMTs. Traditionalists work in just about any of these roles without too much trouble.

Technocratic mages pursue medical roles, too. Besides the obvious Progenitors, you'll have Iteration X cybernetic engineers, New World Order psychologists, Void Engineer field medics and Syndicate insurance underwriters. A mage healer can be useful to just about any group in some fashion, both for healing in action situations and as a sociable character with a recognized standing in peaceful situations (garnering the respect due a doctor or medic). This variety offers a mage healer character many chances to shine in multiple parts of a chronicle.



## ⊕ OTHER JOBS AND LIFESTYLES

Obviously, sheer limitations of space prevent us from covering every possible job permutation, but by now you should have a reasonable handle on how to throw a mage into a normal job equation. A few other ideas worth exploring include:

- **Law Enforcement:** Seen *Law and Order* lately? A mage police officer or Federal agent has no end of criminals to catch and action to undertake. A more supernatural game runs like *The X-Files*. Other cabal mates might be lawyers or otherwise operate as parts of the legal system, so that the mages get things done as judges, juries and executioners, so to speak. Pick up Law, Politics, Subterfuge and maybe some Firearms skills for these characters. Mind magic is very useful in such a game as well.

- **Family-Oriented Mages:** Some families carry a heritage of magic, whether it exists in the form of actual power or just handed-down occult lore. A mage who grows up in a family with a magical history will be much more at home with the occult, and he will have potent allies or mentors in the form of family members. Such a mage could inherit some sort of magical Wonder, and he may have a Merit or Flaw that runs in the family. Even if the mage's immediate relatives aren't Awakened, the odds are good that some of them are sorcerers or acolytes. Some great roleplaying friction occurs if some (but not all) of the mage's relatives are magicians. A sibling might be resentful of the mage's power, or an un-Awakened father might disapprove of and disbelieve in the wife and children's powers.

- **Street Life:** See *Destiny's Price* and *The Orphan's Survival Guide* for some ideas here. A street-level chronicle pits mages against homelessness, poverty, hunger and prejudice in an attempt to survive. One of the great draws of such a chronicle is that seemingly minor accomplishments (starting up a business, getting off the street, surviving a gang conflict) take on major importance to the characters. Otherwise mundane aspects of the chronicle come to the fore that are just as important as the mage's mystic life, if not more so.

- **The Church:** Although Choristers make up the largest block of church-oriented mages, faith is not

really exclusive of any Tradition. A group of mages might share similar faiths, and the mages could work together to promote their religion or a local temple. Alternately, mages might have to reconcile their beliefs with magic or with one another. Churches offer a stepping-stone for mages to become involved in all sorts of community activities, be it simple picnics and social events to charity fundraisers and recruitment drives. Although the Technocracy does not actively frown on religion (which is, after all, the opiate of the Masses), mages who are too outspoken in their beliefs can draw the ire of mortal or supernatural authority. And that's not counting the Inquisition or the other creatures that sometimes infiltrate the church hierarchy. Church-oriented mages tend to have good ratings in Expression (specifically, Oratory) and Academics.

- **The Underworld:** For a little bit of moral ambiguity, stick the mages in the midst of the criminal element. The mages may be criminals themselves, or they may be blackmailed into complicity. Perhaps their families or close friends have hidden criminal ties, which the mages don't find out about until they're already embroiled in conspiracy. Mages with this sort of background obviously need to know Law, and they often have skill in violent pursuits.

Criminal mages don't all have to be knee-busters, though. They can also be forgers, counterfeiters, art thieves, fences and smugglers, with all the appropriate skills. These mages naturally tend to have Flaws relating to their background, such as a secret (criminal past) or an enemy (legal authorities who hunt the mage). On the upside, the mage is already an outlaw, so he's practiced hiding and living on the lam, giving him an edge in evading the Technocracy. And Syndicate mages sometimes wind up running slightly shady operations, too....

We can't tell you all the ways to play a mage. Use these ideas as a springboard for your own creativity. The important thing to remember is to explore not just the mage's role and profession, but the interaction of uniquely magely facets with that role.

AFTER RL





# CHAPTER THREE: TRADITIONAL TIES

K. —

*To look at our relations with various Tradition politics, I've copied down the observations of one Seth Vishvan. Oddly, nobody's really sure what Tradition Seth hails from, and I've never been able to dig it out of him.*

*A lot of mages seem to think that the Traditions are the be-all end-all of magical categorization, but as Seth's didactic words show this just isn't true. Sure, our Traditions — and the Technocrats' Conventions — give some broad categories for cultural identity or magical theory, but really, these groups are more like special-interest clubs than families. You don't have to belong, you can vary considerably from your friend who also happens to be a member of the club, and you can still reap the benefits of your common areas.*

*I'll let you see what Seth has to say, but I think most of it speaks for itself.*

— X.

Life is a game, or so it has been said, and there are winners and losers as well, despite what they tell you. Seems like the collection of toys before death has become something of a sport amongst Sleepers. So goes the game....

The Awakened, in all our smug, 'holier-than-thou' glory, are really not much different. We, too, play a game, complete with winners, losers, the whole nine yards. Acquisition is the name of our goal, like that of the Sleepers, but one significant difference exists. While the Sleepers toil their lives away over illusions, we fight for the ultimate prize, control over the reality that gives birth to those illusions. Other than that, there is little that makes us better, or more human (as some particularly arrogant

mages would say), than our mundane brothers. Like in their game, power, experience and pure know-how are key factors in achieving our ends. But it really just boils down to who you know... and who knows you.

Seeing as the stakes are much higher in the Awakened game, the ties that bind us are forged to be much stronger, much more meaningful, than the loose cons played out by those Asleep. When a friend doesn't even have to be behind you to stab you in the back (take as literally as you like), you learn to pick and choose more wisely, or die before you realize you've made a mistake. There is little safety in our world, and one needs to adapt to that danger. Learn to ride that danger, and you will go far indeed.

# A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST



At one time, in the unimaginably distant past, there thrived a world in which the solitary practitioner of the Art could survive, not only well, but better than those who formed groups. He had no infighting to deal with, and he didn't have to put up with any political games played by plastic people. The legendary pursuit of our ancestors was supposedly pure, the search for understanding and experience

being the prime motivational forces. However, as Sleeper society evolved and material possession started its rise to paramount importance, so too did the mindset of mages change. It was at this point that we saw the rise of such entities as the Hermetic Houses and the growing masses (magical and otherwise) of the soon-to-be Celestial Chorus. In response, other groups and styles began to come together, knowing full well that survival would ultimately depend on sticking with one's own. No formal Traditions existed at this time, beyond fairly small and unorganized groups with similar interests and methods. Thus, we saw the dawn of the Low Mythic Age.

Eventually, the Hermetic Houses and the Chorus influenced the Sleeper community. Perhaps it was merely an accidental realization that to control the Sleepers' minds was to more thoroughly control magic, but, regardless of the initial cause, a race soon developed to control what the mundane considered "real." The would-be Chorus (with its emphasis on external salvation) and the Houses (with their arcane pseudo-sciences) became quick rivals only moderately affected by such unorganized groups as the Wyck. In retrospect, it is difficult to determine exactly who gripped the Sleeper world tighter. In fact, many cases of blending occurred between the two factions — alchemy being a fine example.

However, as the game dragged on and outright war developed between the Chorus and the Houses, a third group was on the rise. This group was capable of destroying both the High Mythic Age and the Hermetics' hold on the population. Yes, this third group was that infamous band of philosopher-scientists, the Order of Reason.

As we all know, the confusion created by the two opposing forces of the Chorus and the Hermetics provided the Order a fertile ground within Sleepers' minds to plant the seeds of their new, lay-person-oriented paradigm. The rest being history, this is the time in our past when mages realized that, in order to survive, we must band together, accepting, rather than criticizing, variant philosophies.

## SAFETY IN NUMBERS

As the High Mythic Age came crashing down around its founders, the Awakened of the time were forced into a spot they'd never wished to be in. Having forgotten their ties to mortal men and women, these once respected sorcerers found the world closing in quickly. The Order of Reason, champions of the common man, led the campaign to rid Earth of magical influence, in attempts to make the world a safer place. With the unconscious command of reality in its hands, the Order was very successful from the start. Paralleled by the Inquisition in the Sleeping world, a grand purge swept across the land, putting a price on Awakened heads and a bounty on places of magic. Lacking the support of those they once controlled, the mages had only themselves to rely on — a fact frightful enough in its own right — and they knew that something had to be done. Thus we saw the birth of the Traditions.

Born from flames of revolution, and nurtured by necessity, the Traditions were the last safe haven for the Awakened. While precursors of the Traditions have always existed, never before had they banded together as they did after the Council sprang into existence. Basically, the whole idea evolved as a way for mages to communicate, practice, meet and survive in an underground movement format. This arrangement had many distinct advantages, of course, but its own set of unique problems, as well.

Bullied into secrecy by the budding Big Brother, Awakened mages the world over inevitably found the protective wing of the Traditions a crucial source of survival. If it isn't obvious, the Technocrats aren't stupid. Despite how powerful she might be in her own right, a solitary mage stands no chance against the agents of logic. On the other hand, if this sorceress is backed by a group of similarly powerful mages, the Union might think twice about stirring its stick near her. Along the same lines, should multiple groups join hands in battle against the Technocracy, all hell could, and would, break loose. Not only would the mere effort of crushing such a force be considered wasteful by this epitome of efficiency, the ripples their war would cause in the collective ocean of humanity would be staggering, to say the least. Such is the philosophy behind the Traditions. Herd mentality? Well, that's debatable. Effective? Without a doubt.

Of course we all know that the hands-held-together image of the early Council is a far cry from the actuality



of their situation. With such a large organization of people from all over the world (as they knew it), it is no wonder that times were tough and that compromise was a precious oasis amidst the flames of rivalry and conflicting interests. So many strong-willed individuals all chasing different leads toward the Light could only spell infighting, and fight they did.

The group that eventually became the Dreamspeakers found the Council's white-man mentality gruesome. The Wyck were still sore from the Chorus' bitter attacks. The Akashics, born in lands far from Europe, saw the West as undisciplined and barely tolerable. What uniting factor could have forged ties that have lasted as long as they have amongst a group so tangled in egocentricity and hatred?

K. —

*Many Traditionalists would consider this history lesson belaboring the point. The Technocrats handed us our asses, we joined together and we formed specialized groups. And?*

*It's said that more important than the events in history are the causes behind those events. We can't stress enough the need to keep our up-and-comers informed of our past formation and mistakes. Of course, history may be as fluid as any other piece of time, but anything from which we can learn lessons is something to which we should pay attention!*

*That said, consider Set's emphasis. The formation of various groups happened for reasons. We spent so long fighting for a global Ascension in the Ascension War that we lost sight of the individual battles for specific people. I think. Too many people got caught up in the gears of our 'noble endeavor' and we never learned our lesson — that, in order to survive, we need the support of the common man. To get that support, we have to support them, in turn.*

*I like to think that magic is the power to serve. I serve the spirits, the forces of nature and the praying hands of our world. Too many mages get caught up in the power as an end. Hmm... maybe this is something to stress during Apprentice programs. Serve not for merited humility or experience, but for service itself.*

— X.

## FROM SURVIVAL TO SOMETHING MORE...

While more traditional mages spout that the Council was born of the Awakened desire to protect humanity from the Union's icy grip, the fact of the matter is that we mages were running like cowards, with our tails between our legs, when the Traditions were created. It

wasn't until significantly later that the whole idea of an Ascension War was formulated.

Many years passed, filled with infighting, organization, restructuring and the like, before any amount of stability was achieved. Once the semblance of structure was attained, arguably around the 16th century, the mages of the Traditions began to realize the significance of what the Order of Reason was up to, as well as what could be done to stop it. Where once the Order had undertaken an Ascension "plot," namely manifesting in the hostile takeover of the world, the Traditions now engaged in an Ascension War with flames fueled by defiance of the Order on all levels.

The fact that the members of the Council adopted sword and shield on behalf of the Sleepers is almost undeniable. However, there was one problem with timing. Having labored unrelentingly since Time's dawning, mankind was delighted by the Technocracy's plan to make life easier through science. Top that with the fact that people had also grown awfully leery and tired of the common Awakened-types (namely mages of the Traditions), and you have a very unwilling recipient of an unwanted salvation. Were the pre-Council mages a bit more compassionate of Those-Who-Snooze, perhaps the Union would never have risen, but that's just useless speculation at this point. The fact of the matter is that now the world of the mundane isn't even aware that it is in desperate need of guidance. People need a different hand to steer reality. They need a hand that'll let them steer a little more liberally.

On the matter of just where the consensual reality should be steered, one will find about as many opinions as one finds mages, and this variety is both a positive and negative aspect of Tradition life. Above all, the Council of Nine is convinced that every human being should have the freedom to choose his destiny, and how he gets there. Just how this freedom is presented, as well as the definition of freedom itself, is what keeps the Traditions from walking the same road as the Union, however. Some say that it is this conflict that prevented the Traditions from attaining any real ground in the Ascension War. I'd be more prone to say that this conflict is the key to winning the battle.

On the drawing board for the Ascension War were three main goals. First among them was the reclaiming and protecting of sacred places, namely Nodes and places of magical significance. With the Gauntlet thickening and the Union hoarding all Quintessence for its own ends, taking back reality would be difficult without these necessary aspects of mage life. Next on the agenda was presenting options to Sleepers. Every

Tradition, to this day, maintains a Sleeper front of some sort, narrowly minding the Rule of Shade, and endlessly searching for potential recruits. All the while, so the theory goes, the Council is planting seeds in the minds of the Sleepers, impregnating the collective unconscious with awareness-expanding

ideas. This plan was intended to make reality more flexible. Finally, we see the actual warfare part of the situation. We defend reality against the Technocracy, with the added clause, *however we see fit*. I think that about speaks for itself.

## CHRONICLES OF EXPLORATION

Hey, Storytellers! If you're gifted with those rare breeds of players who can put aside their game knowledge long enough to build characters who are ignorant of the functioning of their new world, you've got an entire story arc cut out for you.

Most players assume that their starting mage characters (Disciples, usually) have a pretty good handle on Tradition politics, history, the Ascension War and the formation of mage groups. Such isn't necessarily the case, though. Build a group of mages from varying Traditions but assume that they *don't* know the names of all the other Traditions, they *don't* know anything about the Technocracy other than that it's out there and it's dangerous, and they *don't* know a lot of Ascension War history. Then, let them try to figure these things out — or get burned a little as they learn.

Mage games get a lot of exploration. However, that exploration is just as valid coming from the base as at the pinnacle. After all, you don't really have to know all the details of Tradition history just to be an Adept of Forces. Perhaps your character's mentor needed to get your character up to speed quickly, or he just valued practicality over history lessons. Or maybe your mage learned a lot from personal experience, books or other Disciples, which couldn't tell him the whole back story. Either way, you've got a solid hook for a story now.

Such a story would start out with various Disciple-level and lesser mages and their consors, and thrust them headlong into Tradition politics. However, remember that the *characters* in such play wouldn't even know all the other Traditions, let alone how to recognize them, or what sorts of foibles they have. You can run an entire game based around the exploration of a couple of obscure points of history. As the players' characters discover the back-story of Tradition development, they'll doubtless ask their mentors *why* the Traditions did things a certain way. Then they can get indignant or judgmental or curious... and the plot thickens. Just because it's over and done with doesn't mean that it's pointless. How the Traditions did things

in the past continues to affect them in the present. Characters might find themselves agonizing over the former decisions of their Traditions, especially if their own past lives were involved heavily. They could try to move the Tradition in a new direction or educate new members in the (good?) old ways. Best of all, perhaps the characters can't be certain of the accuracy of what they've learned, and they have to think, argue, study and search to figure out "the Truth."

Actually pulling together and running a story based on historical discovery takes some special preparation on the part of the Storyteller. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of letting the players roll some dice and then disgorging chunks of information. Instead, the Storyteller should concentrate not only on the historical data, but on the means to get it and its impact in the story. Like any story, a conflict needs to exist to give the players something to run up against... make history not only the reward, but also the controversy. How, you ask? For any tidbit of knowledge, there's someone who doesn't want it to get out, or who has a skewed viewpoint on it, or who could be hurt by it.

Some neat ideas that you could run with include:

- A Time-oriented character can easily spend a great deal of effort on divinations into the past. Knowing why the Traditions did things a certain way can be useful, but are the divinations accurate? And what about those areas blocked from time-sight?
- Historical research work gives those scholar-mage character types something to do with all those Knowledge Abilities. This search is a great place for showing the use of Academics, Investigation and more esoteric Abilities. The *Library* Background is a big help, too. If the players have to hinge a decision on, say, a legal matter that the Tradition set a precedent for in 1765, they'll go diving for those historical research rules. You can spice this search up with some roleplaying among other Tradition historians and researchers, or by giving them some conflicting sources and letting them sort out the truth. A particularly grim



game might force the players to uncover the truth, only to bury it again so that they can keep it from precipitating some crisis in the present....

- Characters with mentors might be tasked to dig up historical information, or tested on their knowledge of Tradition history. The Order of Hermes and Akashic Brotherhood in particular are fond of dealing thus with young mages. Hit the players' characters up for information that you know they don't have (you stingy Storyteller, you), then make them run around to get it. Since you hold the keys to it, you can get them into all sorts of hot water. Stick the relevant info in some nasty, hard-to-reach place, and direct the chronicle toward whatever locale you want.

- When mages do research, they have this tendency to delve into mystic resources like the Akashic Record or the Digital Web. Great! You can encourage or discourage this behavior as much as you like. Tell them, "Your Akashic Master tells you that the information you seek is not in the Record," or he says, "You suspect that the Digital Web may be a good place to search." The best part about these sorts of information storage is that they tend to be interactive. Instead of the characters just reading or asking about information,

they can get dropped into an entire adventure as they *become* the protagonists in the history, or are inserted into the ongoing historical tale. It's just like walking into a novel. Whether the players then actually change history or not, of course, is up to you.

- Check out *Morte d'Arthur*: The Arthurian cycle is supposedly a repeating legend. What if a given situation mirrors some event in the past? As you unfold the ancient story, the players can draw parallels, identify themselves with the heroes (and villains) of the ancient tale, and perhaps rush to find out the whole story before their own tale ends, so that they have some idea of what's going to happen.

- As a spin on the "dangerous knowledge" trick, have the players dig into some bit of history that has an effect on their friends, family or Tradition. Perhaps the characters really need to know who screwed them over on a deal. However, when they find out who was responsible for the act in question, they discover that it's someone they can't do anything about — like a powerful mentor or even an ally who accidentally (or under duress) wound up on the wrong side.

- Did we mention time-travel, dream-travel and other bizarreness?

## CONFLICT, MOTIVATION, PROGRESS

The past being old news, Awakened society now stands on the brink of reformation, a refreshing of thought in attempts to take action in more effective directions. Brought on by a new generation of leaders and thinkers in the Traditions, this long-expected revival of vigor in the Council has produced some interesting trends. To say the least, the typically opposed members of the Traditions (the Dreamspeakers and the Celestial Chorus come to mind) are increasingly becoming mutually tolerant. Rivalries are once again based on valor and knowledge in friendly competition, and Sleepers are those in need, rather than those we need. Coming full-circle, the Council is realizing that it had lost sight of its foundations, the initial splendor that made it a respectable force in the Ascension War. But, like the dynamic they represent, change comes....

According to the Union's schedule of events (we surmise), the Ascension War is over, and as planned, the Union has won. Begging to differ, I say that its over-confidence is going to be its downfall. In some Tradition circles, the mood is that the War isn't over... it's just changed gears. With the new-found sense of

purpose and camaraderie, and the decision to use subtler methods, Big Brother's got a cold war brewing in his hands. What this all means for the individual is that, if you've ever dreamed of being hero-of-the-day or longed for personal glory, now is the time to take a shot. Sleepers are realizing that the Technocratic ideal isn't all it's made out to be and they're looking for a way out. Pave that way for them, and you're paving your road to the mage's hall of fame. At least that's the idea.

### AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...

Despite all the time spent being at each others' throats, the back-stabbing and the mud-slinging, the Council has stuck together for about 500 years now. With that torrid and long a history, one would wonder how they ever pulled it off. The fact of the matter is that, regardless of whatever the social air in the Council may be, Tradition mages were there for each other in times of adversity. Few threats proved daunting enough to make a Council member turn her back on a fellow mage. Only treason, sometimes worse, could have placed a member in an outcast position or attracted the hostility of the Traditions, and few mages dared cross that line.

Just why members of the Traditions are so committed to the Council is of individual concern. Often times that

commitment comes out of duty, honor and respect for the entity that has allowed their existence, the safest beacon for the Awakened in this dark world. Others are truly committed to the ideals of the Ascension War, chiefly compassion for Sleepers and the desire to share wisdom and knowledge with the whole world. These types are prone to view the Council as the best method to achieve these ends. Still, too, there are mages who feel that the Traditions have come too far to give up now. These mages prefer to keep the legacy of all who've laid down their souls, sanity and lives for all that has been gained up to now, and win the War started so long ago. And last, but certainly not least (especially in number), are those who chose to stay with the Council due to the safety it provides. This choice is particularly common among the Awakened youth, for obvious reasons (much to the dismay of high-rankers).

## A GRAIN OF SALT

If you're not buying all this happy-go-lucky chicanery, I won't be surprised. While there is certainly a marked change in the atmosphere surrounding the Traditions, change is hard to make permanent, or stable for that matter, even for mages. There are many who still resent so-and-so for such-and-such a reason. There are those who still wish to fight Big Brother head on, guns a'blazing, while others hang their heads in despair, mumbling, "Woe is me; all is lost." Worst of all, in my opinion, are those who show blatant hostility towards the Sleepers, on the justification that their ignorance needs to be purged!

While there remain small numbers of these various extremists amongst the Traditions, their ranks grow all the time, whether as formal organizations, or just by the fact that there are more people purporting these views. All extremes seem to be zipping quickly to that area properly deemed "out of control" — Marauder and Nephandizones included. It seems that, as reality spirals further into its fate, the Awakened are pushed further into the depths of excess. What can and will come of it, none can say for sure. One must wonder if this centrifugal force will cause the intimate connection between the Stasis, Entropy and Dynamism to shatter.

An aside, by the way: If you think you can just sit back and not worry about the Technocracy, think again. While the Union doesn't necessarily go out of its way to stomp random mages (like it used to), it won't hesitate at all to knock a Reality Deviant into oblivion. Or worse.

Hmm. That was rather histrionic, wasn't it? Let's just keep it simple. The Traditions have been hit hard, and the world is not a happy place. That's all the more reason to pull together, but it's not all roses.

*One of the common threats of embracing individuality is the rise of extremism. The more the Traditions let their members spin off in strange directions, the more extremism we'll see. Consider it a matter of discouragement. The Traditions have been a lot more open lately about activities that once would've called for censure, ostracism, branding or what have you. Remove the punishments, and you remove the disincentive. We're letting people run further afield, but we have to expect that doing so will occasionally come around to bite us in the ass.*

*That said, I think it's a good thing. We're supposed to be promoting freedom of choice and all, right? Still, it also means that we need to be on the lookout more than ever for quirky Traditionalist allies who get some strange notions into their heads and then expect that they can carry 'em off without any opposition. Some groups have a natural heads-up here. The Eulhanatos and the Order of Hermes, with their strong internal policing, can keep tabs on their people and avoid messes. Looser groups like the Sons of Ether are probably going to see a few nasty explosions before they rope their people in line. But it should be fun to watch, no?*

— X.

## OF MEANS AND ENDS

Collectively, the Council wishes, in a sense, to inspire the populace of Earth to see past the limits imposed by the rigid Technocratic paradigm. The Traditions want to see people dream again, to wish, to know and to have the intense sense of being in control of one's own life, the joy of dancing with the proverbial higher self, the ecstasy of creating reality in your dance. More pragmatic mages even wish to see the safety and generally good standard of living that science allows broadened. Whereas the Union says of reality, *this is how it must be*, the Council wants to say, *this is what people want*.

The methods of the Council as a whole are considerably risky. In current times, the Council has learned to use the media, propaganda, books, movies and music against the NWO. Ever mindful of the so-called Rule of Shade, the Council still realizes that the best way to get at the Technocracy is through the people it oppresses. Of course, there are those who see these attempts as futile, the Union having explained away everything up to petty spoon-benders, but the results aren't too bad. Perhaps "to be expected" is an appropriate way to put it.

On the other hand, the individual Traditions are stepping up on the progress they're making. With each Tradition refining its goals and gearing its methods more precisely, the Ascension War gives way to the Age of the Individual, as these groups are gaining ground thought



impossible just half a century ago. With more focus on enlightening the individual, as well as praising the actions of individuals, the Council sees that its plans of “impregnating the collective” are actually working. There’s little doubt, though, that it will take much time for these seeds to grow and bear fruit of their own.

A look at the modern methods of the Traditions, each in their turn:

### The Akashic Brothers

Perhaps the slowest-growing Tradition of the late 20th century, the Akashic Brothers are, nonetheless, making unheard-of progress. While many have been fighting for better living conditions for their peoples in the Orient, much ground has been won in the worldwide Sleeper community as well. In an interesting twist on the famed Akashic mental networks, the Akashic message of Oneness of the Mind is spread via the Internet, the fastest growing community of mages in the world. Through the Internet, many of this Tradition’s secrets are brought to the attention of just about anybody who cares to use a standard search engine. Diligent students can glean Akashic philosophy and practices from the spread of more mundane information. Concealed among the

huge community of martial arts and philosophy websites, the Akashic networks remain hidden in plain sight. Of course, computer science isn’t the foremost component of the Akashic philosophy, but it’s noteworthy as an exception. Akashic practices spread along with health programs, martial arts schools and acceptance of Eastern philosophy, but that goes without saying.

This Tradition suffers, however, due to the fact that its most powerful members are (for lack of a better word) ancient and out of touch with the modern world. A 100-year-old Master who has spent decades training himself not to rely on tools is unlikely to use the Internet, a car or any of the trappings of modern living. (Not all experienced Akashics are this detached, but it’s certainly more prevalent among this Tradition than in others.)

This makes students worthy of leadership positions a highly sought-after prize to this group of mages. With stodgy mentors, however, the supply of willing students is thin at best. The bottom line is that this Tradition severely needs to modernize in order to appeal to this new generation of the Awakened, while maintaining the customs and time-honored practices that have made this Tradition what it is today. Modern Akashics must



bridge the gap between ancient heritage and high-tech life so that people who are thoroughly ensconced in a technological world can still embrace Akashic ideology and practice. A young Akashic student needs to find the dividing line between practice and patience. After all, someone needs to get out there in the world to recruit people and show them what they're missing. But at the same time, Akashic philosophy demands adherence to meditation, principle and structure away from the demands of a chaotic world. This narrow line is a tough one to walk, which is why the few Disciples who can manage it are so highly prized.

### **The Celestial Chorus**

In a time when apocalypse-mania should be at its highest, this group is well aware that the entire "end-of-the-world" bit has been done to death. Besides, paradise is a distant dream; first the Technocracy, in all its monolithic glory, would need to fall. Therefore, the mages of this Tradition are forced to take a pragmatic approach, a modern, cutting-edge method to draw potentials to the fore. Oddly, they've found the New Age avenue to be a good first start. Once massive opponents of the watered-down spirituality of the New Age Sleeper movement, they now ride high on the crest, with angels, miracles and visions of the divine all being bags of tricks they draw from. What is surprising is that this group still holds so much influence in the Sleeper world. It's even more surprising that they hold back so many secrets.

Secrets are this group's downfall. Many Sleepers have come to the conclusion through independent study or opinion that the Chorus' mundane front, mainly the Church, is an organization of greed and half-truths. Of course the Chorus would be in more trouble had it abandoned its front altogether, but the fact is that it's lost a huge amount of credibility in the Sleeping world. Its focus now lies in rebuilding the bridges accidentally burned by the once-hidden truths it guarded so desperately.

Face it, people are just plain cynical. In this jaded age, faith is a rare commodity. The Chorus needs people with strong principles, but those sorts are hard to come by. So the Chorus gets by with what it's got — students of religion and protectors of the faith. Like anyone else, these individuals have their foibles and peccadilloes. Choristers can't claim to be a group of modern-day saints, and indeed they have plenty of infighting over doctrine in addition to external enemies. So the Chorus takes what help it can get. But in the long run that help sometimes winds up as more of a liability.

An up-and-coming Chorister has his work cut out for him. He not only needs to mediate with the other Traditions and a suspicious modern world, he must manage diplomacy between factions. The new blood has

the zeal and drive to see *real* unification. The Traditions have been near wiped out, damn it, so the youngbloods are fired up to fix it! Without their old Masters sitting around arguing about minor points of doctrine or demanding penance and patience out of the youth, the Choristers of today are activists. They can get behind causes, whether Traditional or mundane, and they find unity instead of division in those causes. That's not to say that they are without prejudice or their share of pugnacious pedagogy, but the Tradition's Disciples are a definite change for the better in a Tradition that has long resisted change.

### **Cult of Ecstasy**

Almost always leading the culture pack, this hip and modern Tradition hasn't so much as missed a beat in the march of time. Social leaders, those defining what is cool and edgy and the cultural elite, make up this Tradition in the new century, and its appeal to Sleepers is phenomenal. Given the clothes we wear as a world culture, the drugs we do and the music we listen to, one would wonder what these guys are doing worrying about their hold on reality, seeing how they influence these media sensations and more. Top all that off with an endless sea of potential members for the Cult (namely the restless and dreaming youth of today), and we have a picture painted of the most sitting-pretty Tradition of all, perhaps ever. Your hip Cult Disciple knows the fashions, fads and styles, he understands how to communicate with and motivate people, and he has a handle on what people like. Although they can be frighteningly uninhibited, they've usually got a handle on what people want. So what are they doing with the massive success they are apparently enjoying this decade?

Nothing. That is the problem with the Cultists. High ideals and higher members don't amount to much more than lip service to a goal that they aren't motivated to obtain. There is a path of wisdom, yes, but it's one of excess as well, and far too many traps await the members of this Tradition to make their success meaningful, at least in the short-term. Perhaps the best the Cult does is inspire the populace to question authority. If they were better organized, or if they had more focus, they would make up a force to reckon with. As things stand now....

### **Dreamspeakers**

Surprisingly, this ancient Tradition has little to worry about modernizing. The onslaught of the industrial world forced the members of this Tradition to adapt quickly and surely. No room for compromise existed, and less exists today. Huge numbers of the Tradition's members and cultures were wiped out, so the survivors had no choice but to find a niche. Of course, this forced adaptation makes the leaders of this Tradition more than just a little resentful.



As it stands in the modern world, the Dreamspeakers are divided along two lines: those who'd see their cultures preserved (and in some cases revived), and those who'd see their cultures fully modernized. Without question, both sides act in favor of their culture's best interests, but as to what those "best interests" are, few can agree. On the side of preservation, the proponents argue that the ancient customs and ways should be kept alive as a symbol of the people's pride, and that the cultures have a basic human right to exist as they always have. The flip side argues that, while the preservationist points are all fine and dandy, what is really going on is a struggle to keep the cultures primitive and isolated from the growing world community. In their minds, the people would be better off should they be allowed to function in modern society. A culture can't survive or keep its identity if it's exterminated.

In either case, the Dreamspeakers will first have to settle the internal conflicts between their varied cultures and viewpoints before they can restore the Sleepers' respect for the spirit world. That's if the spirit world even exists at all by the time they're done.

### **Euthanatos**

Of all the Traditions, and all the progress they've made, the Euthanatos is the only one to have taken what most would deem a downward turn. But that's only through the eyes of one who does not understand the motives of this so-called death cults' actions. This group of soul judges has always taken upon itself the responsibility of purging the Council of unfit members, delivering the Good Death to many Awakened (Apprentice, Disciple, and Master alike). Now, their keen judgment is needed more than ever. In their minds, the Euthanatoi are paving the way for more fluid change in Sleeper and mage society. No one, however, can accuse this dark Tradition of discrimination in any way. Hardest hit of all Traditions was their own, as they exterminated members who used the entropic path merely for personal power.

Unfortunately, most other members of the Council consider the Euthanatoi unfit judges and executioners of the innocent. Far from pragmatic, the Euthanatoi couldn't care less about the other Traditions and their moral leprosy, and so we see the main group at odds with the rest. The Euthanatoi endure the other Traditions' apparent horror grimly, of course, citing that they have nothing to worry about, should they be pure of heart and motive, which leaves one wondering who here is the real threat. Since the Traditions have fractured and lost their leadership, the Euthanatoi are more cautious than ever in their dealings with their allies.

On the bright side, many "new" Euthanatoi make blades in the form of words, publications used to slay

the lies of the past. With pens rather than revolvers, computers as opposed to nerve gas, the more literary Euthanatoi hope to bring down the tyrant fallacy of the Technocracy's "Truth." These types see the death of outdated structures as more conducive to good change than the issuing of the Good Death to mere physical shells.

### **The Order of Hermes**

Like the Celestial Chorus, the Order of Hermes has always maintained very close contacts with Sleeper society, letting certain secrets filter into the occult culture for years. However, wishing to avoid the fate currently besetting the Chorus, the Order is drawing its Sleeper community closer and closer to its vision every day. Like many of the other modernizing Traditions, Hermetics have found the value of the Internet — making the Order one of the most common non-Virtual Adept Tradition groups online — and they are finding the results astounding.

It used to be that the Order maintained fronts, much like the Church to the Chorus, in the form of small so-called magical sects, like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. These mystic lodges were places where potential sorcerers could gather, discuss, debate and generally enjoy the comfort of like-minded individuals. Their main purpose, of course, was to find potential candidates for initiation, and often times they did. However, as more prominent Sleepers in these lodges caught on to symbols behind the Order's teachings, certain members within the Order realized the need to modernize the public Hermetic structure. Thus we see the birth of chaos magic, a Sleeper style that mirrors Awakened philosophy.

Based on the so-called "new physics," mathematical chaos theory and arcane numerological equations of Hermetic origin, the foundation of chaos magic is that belief creates reality, the same idea that mages have known for centuries. The Order has also spread its older roots of alchemy and symbolism through mass-market printing and web-based graphics. Modern language theory, covering everything from lingual drift to artificial language to meme-transfer, gives a whole new spin to Hermetic invocation. Young Hermetic mages take new ways of looking at ideas and apply them to the very founding ideas of Hermetic magic itself.

### **Sons of Ether**

Making a killing from infomercials and late-night television, the Etherites are as largely unconcerned with the Ascension War as they always have been. This Tradition is much more concerned with Science for and of its own sake, happy to inspire humanity when and how it can, but rarely striving these days for the attention of the Sleeper community. Because of this free-style

approach to the Ascension War, the Sons have earned the resentment of many other Traditionalists. But then, why get your hands dirty if there are others willing to play in the mud?

Etherites who do wish to have a positive impact on humanity do so in very indirect ways, often times with odd-ball theories that make it to the mainstream. Naturally, Technocrats are quick to rationalize or debunk Etherite theories, but at least they last long enough to make some Sleepers dream, if not totally realize the lie of “hard facts.”

Since the 1970s, however, a “new physics” has been making its way around the Sleeper scientist community. You guessed it: The Sons take the blame. Like rebellious children thumbing their nose at their parents, this former Convention has pulled one over on the Technocracy. They are literally pointing their finger in a direction science is unwittingly following. Obviously they’re not in control of scientific thought to the degree that the Technocracy is, but it shows the impact a Tradition can have, should it stick to its goals and accomplish them for their own sakes. The new physics started out as a really good idea. Interestingly enough, it was taken up by the Order of Hermes to support its chaos magic theories. Are we seeing a seed sprout here?

Modern Etherites thus run in two extremes: those who follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and promote weird science, and those who dive into cutting-edge science to bend and twist new theories before they even become old and outdated. With their former meeting halls gone and many of their Voidships grounded, the Etherites have had to refocus their efforts on Earthly pursuits. Disciples who want to involve themselves in the mortal world do so through innovations that help individuals or solve specific problems. In magely society, Etherites contribute material, fearless manpower and infiltration of the existing Technocratic paradigm. The Etherites have also been desperate to get their dimensional travel programs working again, and they’ve shown some promise in developing material shielding against the Avatar Storm!

### **Verbena**

Having taken to the information super-highway like many others, this Tradition has been making a comeback. Possessing a more modern pool of Initiates to draw from, the Verbena share many of the same goals as the Dreamspeakers, namely a desire to see cultures and wild areas preserved. As eco-terrorism rises, so too does the militancy of this Tradition. Weapons as broad as propaganda, guns and magically induced natural disasters foster the Verbena cause in warfare. Mention

the fact that this group also has the fastest growing number of Sleeping constituents, and you may see why this Tradition is one of the more promising factors in the Ascension Cold War.

One main problem confronting this Tradition is the scourge of stereotypes. Many Sleepers and modernized mages alike criticize the Verbena’s methods, mythologies and even appearances! Coupled with the fact that these neo-Pagan types can be fluffy-happy one minute and spitefully vengeful the next, you might begin to see why many are turned off by this volatile lot — even though the Verbena aren’t all happy-go-lucky Witchie-Poohs. So what to do? Well, Verbena have never been terribly concerned with image. That might be a mistake. Verbena who want to make a difference need to make their ways accessible to other mages — and to Sleepers — in ways that aren’t frightening or strange.

### **Virtual Adepts**

Leading the way into the new millennium, the gung-ho Adepts are, perhaps, in the best position to enforce change. For one thing, these Council upstarts are well versed in both Technocratic and Council paradigm, knowing where they meet, agree, clash and differ wildly. They have an enormous ability to move vast amounts of information quickly, quietly and effectively. Most Adepts still get a kick out of fragging a few MiBs now and then. So, what is this young Tradition doing with all of its potential? Surprisingly, a lot.

Wrapped in anonymity while roaming cyber-space, these expert persuaders have access to many Sleeping minds at almost all times. They use this boon to instill the seeds of conspiracy into the minds of the public, pushing their own weird agendas, special pieces of information and brain-twisting theories. Not really caring how credible they seem or actually are, the Virtual Adepts use the Net more to stir shit than anything else, and shit-stir they do! Particularly creative Adepts can leave whispers in their wake that are loud enough to keep the Technocracy cleaning up the mess for weeks. But it doesn’t end there.

Besides playing with the Sleepers, the Adepts have the best ways to attack the Technocracy directly. They are able to take out systems, factories, banks, et cetera, with but the push of a button (or two). As of late, however, the Adepts have been more concerned with showing the world that it is in control of technology, not the other way around. Whereas many Traditions see science and reason as oppressive to the soul of humanity, the Adepts purport that oppression is caused by the Technocracy’s use of technology, nothing more. If people would but allow it, technology could be a tool of freedom unpar-



alleled by any other Tradition construct. Some Adepts hope to take the “freedom of information” to the level of disseminating *all* technological understanding to the Masses. Others just concentrate on cleaning up specific problem cases like Internet crime, fraud or businesses that step on their personal pet peeves. More than one Adept has plowed through a company’s records just to revenge some slight against his ideology. This anarchic streak keeps them unpredictable, but it also means that they continue to be heralds of change.

These days, any given Adept is as likely to be a mathematician, musician, engineer or whatever as a computer cracker. While the Web was (and is) a fertile playground, it’s not going to solve all the problems of the world — a shocking concept to the older Adepts who thought that Reality 2.0 would take care of everything! So, now, Adepts are looking for new toys with which to play. Some Traditionalists are uncomfortable with the level to which a few Adepts seem to be encroaching back into the areas of their former Technocratic thinkers. Cybernetics, bioengineering and cognitive science have boomed in popularity among Adept studies. However, the Adepts were never ones for rules, and it looks like they’re going to continue to take in new things to see and do.

### **The Hollowers and Their ilk**

Hovering on the edges of the Council like those too cool for the rest of the party, the Hollowers and other Orphans of the Awakened world are at their best time to shine. To understand just where these pseudo-groups are going, though, it is best to first consider their mindset. Snobbish and arrogant, the Disparates act like those waiting for an invitation to the biggest bash in town, and, when they realize it’s not forthcoming, they turn their noses up like they didn’t want to go anyway. Now hold this analogy to the candle-flicker of the Council, and you’ll see what I’m saying. Unfortunately, generalizations in this area are bound to get sticky. The above only holds water for roughly one-third of the Hollowers and Disparates.

The Ascension War? Half of this group gets tense, defensive and uptight, like a neglectful baby-sitter caught in the act. Another half can be squeezed tight enough to get the faintest snicker or snide remark, but you seriously have to try here. And the other half (yes, I realize this is the third half — obviously you don’t know how big a group this is!) yields a dreary-eyed “Wha...?” response, seemingly rehearsed, but for the total spontaneity.

As for those who are aware and taking action, their methods are about as brash and unorganized as any can expect from such a shabby Craft. Now, if the Hollow Ones were to organize and take steps in the right direction,

### **MODERN THINGS TO DO**

The broad Tradition stereotypes presented here aren’t designed to replace or rehash the material from the core rule book. Rather, they’re a look at what’s happening with each Tradition *right now*, as well as what modern characters in those Traditions are doing. Of course, this is all going to vary with the needs of your chronicle!

On the player side: First off, remember that your mage isn’t a Tradition clone (that’s the Progenitors, thanks). Although these guides can (hopefully) give you some ideas of the sorts of hurdles ahead for modern Tradition mages, it’s more important to use them to mesh with some ideas that are already applicable to your character. Just because you’re a modern Akashic doesn’t mean that your character *has* to have a dojo and a website. However, you should be prepared to deal with your character’s Tradition taking steps in that direction, and you should think about how your character feels about it! Oh, and remember to consult with your Storyteller.

On the Storyteller side: You can, of course, run the Traditions as you like. These suggestions give you an idea of what’s happening in our “canonical” World of Darkness, if you care about that. The key point is that the Traditions have to change to keep up with the world — your world. Once you decide how your World of Darkness is changing, sit down and think about how the Traditions change in response, or fail to do so. A Tradition’s failure to address some major concern could very well spell their end! Unlike vampires, who are going to maintain a long-running structure with immortal authority, mages are still mortal, and they can (and do) run out of time. Even mages who manage to extend their life often do so at the expense of their time on Earth, which in turn means that Earth-bound magical leaders will go through changes. Just as each generation remakes the world in its image and fights against its predecessors, so too do mages rebuild their society and break with their old ways. The Traditions may be more hidebound than most, as indicated by their name, but they too change, especially in the wake of the Reckoning. Give them some credit, and take the time to think about those changes in your game.

this Sleeper-luring Craft could gain some real influence in the Council and otherwise. The question is, do they really want to grow up and be responsible, or will they forever choose to be the tragic youth. The way things look now, I think they've got the answer pretty settled....

The independent Crafts, on the other hand, are a wreck. For the most part, they had buried their heads in the sand, hoping to avoid the entirety of the fight. Most just wanted to practice their ways in peace. Well, too bad! When the future of the world is at stake, there's no magic Switzerland. As best the Traditions can tell, most of the Crafts have been slaughtered and scattered. A few remain here and there, and a couple have finally come to the table with the Traditions in search of allegiance. Modern Craftsmen are in a desperate bind. Their groups have even less hold than the Traditions, their cultures are dying and they *have* to pick sides now.

You wanted the dirt on what the Technocracy's doing these days, by Convention? As usual, they stick together, but not so much as they used to. Their coordination and control has dropped rather precipitously and morale's suffered as a result. Furthermore, there seems to be more low-level communication than upper-echelon instruction - that is, they've lost their head honchos just like we have. Most importantly of all, though, is the result of one of their latest emergency Symposiums. It seems that the Technocracy has decided that it has bigger problems than the Traditions, and it has passed a series of resolutions to that effect. (In point of fact, their resolutions run to the better part of four thousand pages and are phenomenally dense, but I'll save you the effort.) In short, hunting down mages isn't the priority that it once was, and instead the Technocrats are consolidating strength, working to advance science in a stagnating world and trying to figure out just what the hell caused everything to go to shit all at once.

## ⊕ THE TECHNOCRACY

As I'm a dyed-in-the-wool non-Technocrat, I can't speak too authoritatively on them. Still, one can only assume that they're having their own growing pains. After all, they've accomplished some of their great goals, but what do they have to show for it? A rather unhappy world. I'd imagine that the Conventions have their own forms of dissention in the ranks, even if the Technocracy doesn't tolerate such as highly.

*Indeed they do, and that's why I've taken the liberty of transcribing some material from our favorite computer custodian, Cathrine.*  
- X.

## Iteration X

The Iterators prided themselves on precision and machine efficiency. No wonder they've undergone the most changes recently. Without direction from their "Central Computer," young Iterators are free to study where their interests take them. Without the heavily funded Pogrom, Iterator recruits don't need training camps, military support or heavy cybernetic modification. It was an Iterator who first submitted the plan that pulled back on the Pogrom. Some Iterators now eschew all personal cybernetics entirely!

Don't get me wrong, though. There are still far, far too many Iterators who will dutifully wreck a mage without so much as a flicker of conscience. Metallurgy, weapons-engineering and robotics are still their mainstays, and they continue to pump out all manner of killing machines. However, individual Iterators are far more likely to closet themselves in pure science or engineering. Many just want to re-establish communications, introduce new science to the Masses or make better tools,



without getting dragged into personal combat. They'll leave the firefights to cybernetic grunts. Truly inspired researchers are just too valuable to expend in front-line combat against an already-broken enemy. (Like we're going to roll over and die.)

Oh, an aside. Apparently the Iterators never studied "Dimensional Science" – an unusual oversight for the arguably most gadget-oriented Convention of the Technocracy, go figure. This is no more than a strong suggestion at this point, but given the troubles with dimensional interstices lately, Iterators aren't too hot to go exploring in dangerous areas where they have no previous experience.

### New World Order

For a Convention that centers itself on communication and information, little could be more terrifying than suddenly finding everything thrown into chaos with all previous data useless and all coordination inoperative. The New World Order's suffered heavily due to the Reckoning. The best remaining agents are those who have strong ties in place with mortal society. High-level agents had an unfortunate tendency to lay all their eggs into the baskets of specialists, and with communication across the Horizon (or Dimensional Barrier, if you will) all screwed up, they have nobody to talk to. Boo hoo!

On the upside (for them), the New World Order's agents are very good about following mortal trends, so adaptation for them has been quick. The lessened Pogrom means that they get to spend even more of their time and resources covering academic institutions and media, which still only hurts the

Traditions. NWO agents update their stranglehold on the perception of truth continually. The best advice is to lie low and avoid 'em if you can; assume that they'll know about you, though. Black Hats and Mirrorshades are still a sight enough to scare any Traditionalist, but they're not necessarily an instant death sentence.

Word is there's a bit of a shake-up going on among some of the rank-and-file. Since the heavy thinkers aren't around to enforce policy, deviant ideas can take root a little more easily. End result? There are some agents who don't cleave as closely to the Convention as the Union would like. Whether this trend will go anywhere remains to be seen. But then, I wouldn't have mentioned it if you didn't know where I'd placed my bets, right?

### Progenitors

Probably the least impacted of the Conventions, the Progenitors have a "business as usual" attitude in the wake of the Reckoning. They keep pushing cloning and genetics and they're making incredible strides, as shown by the introduction of much of their technology in recent years. After their bizarre mad scientist phase stemming from the late 1800s and influencing some of their cloned leaders as late as the 1990s, they've cleaned up a lot of their act and homed in straight on medicine. They've got their shit together.

All of these reasons are good ones not to fuck with Progenitors. They are with it, they know what they can do, they are advancing their agenda successfully, and the only thing they've lost in the Reckoning is communication with the unstable nut-ball clone

leadership that had them churning out crazed monsters and pointless toxins. The change in funding emphasis means that their research programs are even stronger than before, and they still have all of the incredible cloning and genetic modification technology to make them difficult to fight and kill. Worst of all, overzealous Traditionalists who decide they're gonna "whack 'em a few Progenitors" are almost certainly putting the nails in the coffins of dozens, maybe hundreds of normal people who rely on the medical care networks that Progenitors staff and use.

Hands off these guys for now.

## Syndicate

I have some personal beefs with the Syndicate; call it bias. (You'd think that a Virtual Adept would have it in for the information-controlling New World Order, wouldn't you? Go figure.) As far as I'm concerned, these guys were always dirty, and they still are. A group that has nothing to do but mess with other peoples' money seems inherently screwed up, to me.

The Syndicate didn't rely too heavily on extra-Dimensional leadership. Some of their VPOs – their Vice-Presidents of Operations – still resided on Earth to keep their fingers in the world economy directly. This means that the Syndicate has the most top dogs remaining out of the various groups, but conversely, they have the least hard-science knowledge. Syndicate ops are still well funded; their assets and allies were 99% Earth-based, and they have not suffered from the Avatar Storm or any of the other craziness.

The word is that the Syndicate's biggest problem is internal. Its operatives are not really trusted

even by the other Conventions. One of the Syndicate VPOs was responsible for coming up with their program to quash the Crafts, but her follow-through got cut out when the Pogrom was derailed, and she's not happy. (A little war is good for the short-term economy, they say.) The Syndicate also explores other avenues of revenue and comes up with some unusual research, to say the least, given their usual lack of interest in hard science. Syndicate ops today have their hands full keeping the other Conventions happy. From there, they also have to stay on top of the constantly changing world economy, like always. Most of their reps are just doing the same jobs as ever, for now.

## Void Engineers

Just as much as I despise the Syndicate, I like these guys. They've got a sense of style and class, and they're actually decent sorts when you are both stuck out in the great beyond (of the Web, of space, of the Umbra) and there's no room for infighting. Too bad they got bitch-slapped so hard.

A lot of people kept grumbling on about how the Void Engineers still kept alive a sense of wonder and that they sounded ripe for defecting. Not happenin'. See, the Void Engineers already had a bad rap, because of their overactive imaginations and the fact that they did a lot of stuff that the other Conventions didn't understand and couldn't keep tabs on. Now, the Pogrom's not as important, and the Avatar Storm helps to keep the barrier between dimensions even safer while also making it difficult to travel. That means that the Void Engineers have been shot in the foot – they can't fulfill most of their major mission parameters. They've got ships and stations



stranded in other dimensions, troops with no funding and very few places left to explore on Earth.

So what do they do with their time? Obviously, Void Engineers beyond the Gauntlet are still trying to get home. Nobody's found a foolproof way to get back yet, but that's not going to stop them from trying, or from communicating. Who knows? They may even be working with our boys on the other side. Here on Earth, the Void Engineers are working on colonization of near space, but they keep running into problems – losing that Mars probe just because the Avatar Storm happened to show up and blow away their telemetry Devices can only be called bad luck. Some are turning back to exploration of the seas, but undersea habitation still

isn't practical for the Masses yet. For now, they're in a frustrating holding pattern. Scientists and engineers often wind up cooperating with Iterators on new projects of weaponry or material construction, while soldiers are decommissioned or reassigned to floating units instead of standing forces. About the only Void Engineers on the rise are the ghost-hunting types, the ones who track down and trap or eliminate supernatural phenomena. Since the Traditions aren't as high a priority now, these kinds have more time to hunt down strange manifestations that are threatening to humanity.

All in all, the Void Engineers are some fun guys taking some hard knocks. If you meet one, see if you can't give 'em something to do and convince them that our way is better.

## THE FUTURE OF THE WAR

"The Ascension War is over, all is lost, and reality is the Unions' for the picking," so it has been proclaimed by Technocrat and Council mage alike. I don't buy that, and neither do most of my kind. The War has merely changed gears from open warfare to the Cold War tactics that our governments have been playing for years.

Funny how things change. You have the whims of the Awakened dictating reality to the Sleepers one minute; the next you have the folly of Sleepers as a mold for Awakened actions. Regardless, one thing is for certain: The time of the individual is here. At this unimaginably important point in future history, each Awakened soul has the option either to give up or to fight on, carrying the banner of the dynamic into

a possibly glorious future, one where the destruction of the Technocracy will make good tales around the equivalent of the campfire. With every letter I write, I risk the chance of another bullet in my body... what do you think I chose to do?

*All right, so the Ascension War is functionally over, but that doesn't stop some of us from continuing the fight. Atom. Others just want to get on with their lives, as mentioned previously in this work. It's not so cut-and-dried. I'd hardly class mages who don't fight the Technocracy as 'sell-outs,' but Seth's got his priorities. We're all passionate about something, I suppose.*

— X.

## TIME POLITICKING AWAY



Like I've said before, the Ascension game is officially over. You want to know why? Well, it goes akin to a chess game; all the Council's best pieces have been taken. All that remains are a few pompous bishops and a handful of pawns. Maybe a queen (with all the raw power we still retain). Despite the odds against us, and the official loss of our collective kings, there is a rule in chess

that, should a pawn get to the other side of the board before being captured, he can up his power, at least to queen status. What I'm about to give you here are some good, albeit dangerous, methods of moving, pawn-like, from one side of the board to the other. Remember, Grasshopper, it is your choice to move at all. I accept no responsibility for your eyes becoming bloodstains on the bottom of anyone's steel-toes. Got that?

## POWER-PLAYING FOR A NEW GENERATION

For the time being, consider yourself a pawn. Now that we've got that out of the way, let's move on. As a pawn, you have certain expectations placed on you, certain limits you're expected to live in, and certain moves you're not allowed to make. Let's cover what you allegedly can't do first.

### THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

First things first. The most important thing to keep in mind, oh Disciple of the Art, is that you are expected to respect your elders. This may sound obvious to some and absurd to others, but it is an important tenet, nonetheless. The reasons are manifold, and chief among them is the fact that your elders can frag you without a second thought. All too often, a lesser mage challenges an Adept in anger, only to be left a fried shadow of his former self. Avoid this fate at all costs. The ego-boost is hardly worth the effort and agony. As a matter of fact, you'll find your travels made easier, should you possess the right amount of tact when dealing with those in higher positions than yourself. Be careful not to brown-nose, however; any subject worth impressing will catch on, and likely hate you for it. About the only Tradition with members that enjoy such groveling are the Hermetics, although even they disdain the thought of such a fool in a position of real power.

The second item on our list of important limitations to consider is that of association. While I'll deal with this subject in-depth more later, who you know is vastly more crucial to surviving in mage society than what you know, like it or not. Many times when seeking training, guidance, help, or whatever, the contacts you've made in your past will undoubtedly be brought up, for good or ill. This is why, as a Disciple of the Art, you must take caution in the ties you make. Never trust anyone (without damned good reason), and know that to be stuck on face value is the bane of success in our world. A good rule of thumb in understanding your contacts is to be aware of motivations. In the game we play, *why* you do something is the real gem; *what* you do is merely the side-effect of your *why*. As my mentor said, "Judge not by one's actions, but by their motivations. Only then will the real man show his face."

Perhaps of equal importance as the previous reminder, know that your motivations are certainly being put under the scrutiny of "those-who-matter." When seeking to impress the proverbial elders, attempt to be good in spite of yourself. Make it at least *appear* that your actions are for the good of the Tradition or humanity

or whatever. If you can't even pull this off, expect to be treated like the self-glorifying megalomaniac you are. The time of the smug hero has passed; the unsung have risen to primary importance these days. Oh yeah, don't expect undue praise. Appreciative people are few are

*Politics without ass-kissing? How is it possible? you ask. Seth mentions bowing to your elders, but one of the very real possibilities is that you may have no elders in your area. You could well be among peers, or perhaps even slightly ahead of the others of your Tradition in your corner of the world.*

*Still, politics among peers follows similar rules. You don't insult your peers' intelligence, you don't talk down to them, and you don't make assumptions. These days, few enough of us can claim fair mastery of one Sphere, so you never can tell what your Tradition-mates have learned. Better safe than sorry, right?*

*The first thing is to make sure that you're established as one of the peers. Breezing into a room with trenchcoat billowing and attitude in hand may work for Mark Pillion, but you aren't him. You're going to be weighed on what you bring to the table. Your destiny and the strength of your Avatar may count for power when you need to kick ass, but that's not the point of politics. You need to come in with an idea of who's there, what they want and what you can afford to kick in. Nobody will take you seriously if you don't have any reason for them to talk to you. Conversely, they'll do their best to avoid you if you try to dominate the situation. We're in these Traditions because we get something out of them, after all.*

*Once you're in, remember that these are your peers. You don't like being treated like dirt, and neither do they. Expect that you will have to make concessions. Unless you are in a position to make demands — in which case, you're playing conquest instead of politics — you're not going to get your way on everything, and not everyone will see things your way. And certainly just shows that the dispute came down to a horn where nobody would budge, not that you're some sort of ass-kicker.*

*So you're sitting at the table, you've got something to offer and you're dealing equitably — what's last? Only bother if you've got a reason. In the past, you had to play politician to get into the Master ranks for most of the Traditions. Nowadays, you can just study and advance by acclaim. Thus, the motivations for politicking are a little different: Agenda-advancement and personal enjoyment are the two primary ones. If you don't know why you're there, you won't be able to defend your position coherently. Don't get forced to the table's choice to negotiate. Compromise with your peers. Offer something to get something. That's how the Traditions work together.*

— X.



far-between in this world. So, while glory is achievable, don't seek it, or else you'll never find it.

Last on the list, the pivotal point of all the above, is the obvious limit of skill. You, as a mage, must be acutely aware of what your knowledge allows you to do, as well as that which it prevents you from doing. This warning may seem like a no-brainer, but I've seen many an egotistical Disciple charge foolishly into shit he can't handle, and, trust me, the results are enough to make a Nephandus cringe. I look at it as natural selection, but who am I to say? Anyway, pawn, consider this your warning.

This last reminder serves as a guide when getting training. Knowing these things honestly about yourself will allow you to seek appropriate training, as well as pre-

venting you from entering any bargains you can't fulfill. Sometimes, as has happened to me, a would-be mentor will offer to train you in return for the fulfillment of some absurd quest you couldn't possibly succeed in. Often times, the real challenge is to see whether or not you can accept your limits and decline. Otherwise, it could be the demands of a crack-pot. Please re-read suggestion two....

That about covers the more important limitations in which people in your position will find themselves. Keep in mind that I stress the important ones, items of almost universal understanding, agreed on by the tried-and-true. Now we'll move on to the more enjoyable aspects of gaining recognition. Fasten your seat-belts; we're only about to take off.

## FACTIONS



Once you're recognized in your Tradition and you actually have a little political experience, you'll find yourself playing to the interests of a group. Representative democracy comes pretty naturally to Westernized mages, and the whole Tradition structure encourages mages to group together and appoint a speaker. (That's how the Council worked, after all.) So, if you're parlaying the interests of a specific group of mages within a Tradition, especially due to some ideological quirk (and *especially* if some of them are your Apprentices), then congratulations! You're well on your way to forming a faction.

Most of the Traditions already have a fair number of factions. You were probably trained by a mentor who shared the beliefs of a specific faction. However, this assumption is by no means universal. In brief, for those who missed it, a faction espouses one specific take on a Tradition's teachings. A faction might consist of a bunch of Akashic Brothers who all happen to be strict Taoists, for instance, or maybe a club of young Republican Hermetics (brrr).

So what's the point? Well, factions (or Methodologies) are like little sub-Traditions (or sub-Conventions). Each faction gives its members a couple of contacts who have very, very similar views of magic and the world in general. This is a great way to make allies and to get specialized training. After all, if you learn your magic from someone who does stuff *just like you do*, you're sure to pick it up easier. Plus, factions often develop special resources, stories, rites or Wonders for their own use.

### JOINING A FACTION

Most mages join a faction during their formative magical training. Mentors don't just hand down magical structure and Tradition heritage. They pass on their own beliefs about the cosmos and their intra-Tradition political views. A conservative mage is likely to put that sort of spin on his reasoning when explaining Tradition policy, and likewise a more open and liberal mage may attribute such motives in history lessons. Since an Apprentice may not know any better than to believe what he's told — it's not like the history books in high school explained the history of the Verbena — most Apprentices wind up following their mentors into a given faction. Otherwise, they decide based on their own religious, social and political ideologies.

If you aren't part of a faction, it's not that difficult to sign up. Factions aren't even as regimented as your local country club. You don't have a membership card, after all. (Well, there's one Hermetic cabal that does, but that's another story.) Joining a faction is more like getting involved in a conspiratorial cell. Think of it as a conspiracy within a conspiracy. Your Tradition is a hidden subculture of mages, while your faction is a tinier group within *that* subculture. All you need to do is hook up with some nominal member of the faction, profess your understanding of its tenets and pass whatever tests the group may devise.

Of course, it's not necessarily easy to *find* a faction or faction member. Perhaps you've heard of the Order of the Golden Chalice but you've never met a faction member and you wouldn't know where to start. Since the Council's been largely demolished, it's difficult to get introductions through mentors, Masters and similar

cross-factional contacts. Instead, you have to do your own legwork. For just this sort of thing, several factions use their own signature rites to help identify members. Euthanatos factions may use Entropy magic to mark their members with destiny, while a fiery Hermetic faction

could wear common brands. Ask around — chances are that your friends in your Tradition can tell you a little, and you can use sensory magic to look for the telltale signs noted previously.

## FORGING A FACTION

For those who don't hold with any of the other factions, there's always the option of starting your own. Though doing so is a rough road, it's much more accessible now than it once was. The Hermetic Houses had to come from somewhere, after all.

Pulling together a faction is a matter of gathering support from like-minded individuals. You've got to be playing the political game, of course. You have to know people, grease palms, make a few convincing speeches and find some folks who'll work with you and won't drag your good name in the mud. Factions aren't necessarily

### FACTION BENEFITS

As noted in **Mage: The Ascension**, a mage can choose his faction's preferred Sphere as his specialty Sphere in place of the Tradition's usual one. This option should only be available to a mage who does his Apprenticeship in that faction. You can't decide to change factions in mid-game just to get a cost break on a different Sphere! Rather, this mechanic gives you the opportunity to learn a Sphere that would break from your Tradition's normal progression.

In addition to the hard-and-fast Sphere benefit, a faction immediately identifies the character as a follower of a specific philosophy and means that the character gets all the associated friends and enemies. Your character's mentor, if any, is probably from the same faction; allies and associates in mage society probably also know of the character's factional affiliation. Depending on whether the others have their own factional beliefs, this recognition may influence their reactions toward the character.

Many factions also use specialized tools and magic in their procedures. Just as the Order of Hermes has its own secret rites and rituals, so too do each of its Houses have their own private secrets. It's up to the Storyteller to determine the exact nature of these benefits (or problems). They could be as simple as having one characteristic rite that everyone knows, or as broad as having hereditary Wonders, internal ranks, formal protocols, set meeting times, specialty rite training, marks, sigils, hand signs and anything else that a secret club of magical conspirators might use.

The factions in play, of course, vary with the Storyteller's whims for the game. The **Mage** rulebook offers various factions for the Traditions, but these are by no means the limit of the factions, and Storytellers can omit or change them, too. It's up to the Storyteller to decide on the faction's benefits and hindrances as suitable for its type: the Order of Hermes' House Flambeau almost certainly has several specialized fire rites, but the Celestial Chorus' Monists are more theological than magically specialized.

In case you didn't notice, though, you don't have to be a member of a faction.

### THE FACTION-FORMATION STORY

Players who love political spice can really sink their teeth into a story about the formation of a faction. Whether a player's character founds the faction or simply supports someone else's effort, this story is a great way to put a personal spin on **Mage**.

Think about it. Not only do you get to dive into Tradition politics, you get the fun of training Apprentices and making your own indelible belief system. For players who enjoy the highbrow aspect of debating **Mage** philosophy, there's almost no better setting!

A faction-formation story runs a little differently than the average confrontational "bang-up" **Mage** game, primarily because the adversaries are likely to be purely internal. A character must hammer out the details of his beliefs as he spreads them and teaches them. Then, he'll run into pressure from his peers to conform or antagonistic mages who don't like his ideas. The player must make room for his faction in the Tradition's halls and establish its own identity. This effort can easily make or break a mage's reputation without him ever running afoul of one Technocrat or Nephandus.

The best part of faction-formation lies in ongoing settings. You can have the fun of setting up your own mark on a Tradition and teaching Apprentices in your form, and then you can take on those Apprentice's roles. Or, perhaps, in a long-running chronicle, you'll see other mages flocking to the banner that you established several stories ago.

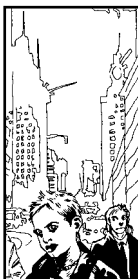


geographically bounded; especially for groups like the Virtual Adepts. They can just be several people who communicate by whatever means — computer, Correspondence magic, messengers — and share similar beliefs and goals within their Tradition. It helps to have some local friends, but it's not strictly necessary.

What is necessary is that your faction propagates its philosophy. In other words, you have to teach Apprentice mages according to what you believe. If you're

not tutoring others in your beliefs, you haven't worked them out to satisfaction or you just aren't interested in the politics of factions, what's the point? You have to put your distinctive stamp into your Tradition's culture if you want to get recognized as a real faction. A new faction won't get taken seriously if it's not bringing in new blood. You can accelerate this process by building your faction's own signature materials: Wonders, rites and sigils of recognition.

## CHANTRIES AND HOUSES



Another aside on Tradition organization, since we don't live in a vacuum. The counterparts to factions are, of course, Chantries. While a faction is a philosophical subdivision of a Tradition, a Chantry is a physical gathering place for Tradition mages. While factions discuss matters within a given Tradition, a Chantry house offers security for many different mages of various Traditions.

Chantries can take any number of forms. They're not just looming Gothic manor houses, although some

mages seem to favor that type.... A Chantry is designed with several ideas in mind. Some are actual living quarters for mages, others are simple meeting places, and a few are military bases, although those last are more and more rare these days.

Since the vast majority of cabals can't afford to hop into and out of the Umbra for every meeting or fast-food trip, most Chantries have a physical location and have Umbral space that's only used in emergencies. Granted, a Disciple doesn't usually have to worry about too much injury when crossing, and if the other side is secure, it



can be dealt with there. But who wants to take the risk when it's unnecessary?

Channies' forms reflect the preferences of their founders, of course. Depending on the Chantry, this form could be a simple cottage or an elaborate reconditioned warehouse. Usually, a Chantry is founded by multiple mages in concert. A lone mage usually doesn't have the resources to fund one completely, and tying a Chantry to a single individual can be disastrous if that individual gets lost, is shortsighted or winds up betraying the group.

So why bother with the hassle of setting up a Chantry? Well, do you really want to store your valuable library in your apartment where it can be noticed or stolen by the neighbors? For that matter, do you want to practice hurling fire in the middle of your own house? Thought not. A Chantry is a research and resource house shared by multiple mages in a locale that's protected and safe for experimentation, even if it's not a sanctum.

To set up a Chantry, of course, you've got to have three things: support, planning and resources.

By "support" I mean political clout. If you build it and nobody comes, the Chantry is nothing but a liability. Worse, if you set up an unauthorized Chantry and it falls to outside forces, you'll find yourself answering some unpleasant questions about any lost material and mages. Once you've got the go-ahead, it's time for the planning stage. Figure out exactly what your Chantry's going to do and how it's going to work. Are you going to build a defensible research facility with heavy walls, multiple labs and a secret escape route, all without attracting attention? Didn't think so, again. You can't have everything, but you'll need to figure out what sort of place you want, how you're going to categorize it and who's going to be there. Lastly, you need resources. A well-planned Chantry is only as good as the funding you can put behind it. Don't forget magical and social clout, too. Your pocketbook will determine how much you can afford. You'll need to lean on your knowledge of law and influence to check out zoning and licensing, and a Chantry is pretty much useless without magical material for study support.

The best part of being in a cabal that founded a Chantry is that you get to lay out the terms of what it's got, and you get first dibs. Typically, a cabal takes up the responsibility of supporting a Chantry (although you can always take over and renovate a lost one if you don't feel like establishing a new one). Your cabal can even name the place after itself and set the rules and terms. You also get to decide who gets to visit, what sorts of favors are charged for use and so on. Doing so is especially important if your Chantry is established on the site of a Node. With the recognition of the Traditions

as a group — through that politicking with your peers that we discussed earlier — you can get backing in case someone violates your Chantry or hospitality.

## MODERN DESIGN

While Channies used to be built at sites with access to Nodes, at important gateways into the Umbra and in defensible positions, this just isn't the case any more. There never were enough Nodes to go around, and the Gauntlet makes Umbral extensions rather impractical (though not impossible). Since the Technocracy's turned its focus inward to deal with its own problems, Channies don't seem to get a heavy search-and-destroy pattern much these days — but those that *do* get caught go down quickly.

A Chantry is now more important as a place of learning, a locale for practice, a home-away-from-home and a social center. Channies always served these functions before, but now, instead of setting up heavily defended fortresses and duking it out with Technocrats, we can afford to pick up some lighter, better-concealed locales and turn them to our advantage.

Ultimately, a Chantry is a place where groups of various mages and their allies will meet to talk, plan, practice and socialize. Channies these days are built less around military forms, instead emphasizing the comfortable and utilitarian nature of old homes, libraries and even restaurants. This isn't to say that Channies don't have traps and weapons; cabals don't remain defenseless. It's just that steel-reinforced concrete walls and machine guns are not the priorities that they once were.

## CHANTRY COMMUNICATION: HERALDS

Given that Channies are inviolable territory controlled by specific cabals (sometimes of a specific Tradition), matters of territoriality can sometimes get a little hot under the collar. If you and your six lean-and-hungry friends come meandering into my Chantry with a "Hello, Sailor" and start flipping through the library, there'll be a scene. And the Traditions don't need any more infighting than they've got.

Formal diplomats from established Channies are called heralds. A herald has the equivalent of Tradition diplomatic status. The herald can enter Channies freely, speak his mind, deal equitably with superiors and even expect limited access to the more secretive fortresses that some factions maintain. The kicker is that the herald can't use this position for personal purposes. Rather, the herald represents the interests of his own Chantry. Thus, when a herald shows up knocking at your door, he isn't just there to snag a few choice bits



## PLAYING A HERALDIC CHRONICLE

Usually, heralds work alone. A herald is considered a member of a Chantry, but she travels and arranges contact and communication. If you think of a Chantry as a conspiratorial cell, the heralds are the cross-cell levels. Since their work tends to make them loners, they can be difficult to use as centers of chronicles.

Except... in this age of uncertainty, Chantries need as many allies as they can get. Most Chantries are sending out multiple heralds to different locations. In such a game, the players' mages would not come from one single Chantry. Rather, they would be a group of heralds who hail from multiple different Chantries, but are traveling from Chantry to Chantry to carry out diplomacy, bring messages and perform other herald duties. Each mage represents the interests of a different Chantry, but they all go to the same places at once and move in a group for safety. You can get a good look at the characters' background, too, by having them visit their home Chantries in the course

of the game. Each herald, in turn, would get a chance to interact with his home turf while the others politic there on behalf of their patrons, and the cycle would continue as the group moved on to others.

Heralds naturally lend themselves to all sorts of adventure possibilities, too. Besides just intrigue while they're at Chantries, their travel means that they have the opportunity to get lost in strange places — wherever the Storyteller likes. They may be dispatched to deal diplomatically with other non-mage threats like vampires or unknown creatures. Herald's are often used as couriers and messengers, and there are *always* people who want to steal the packages or stop the letters. Since heralds spend lots of time on the road away from regular Nodes and resources, they have to rely more on their wits to deal with problems. This structure is great for an episodic story; you can always get into a more settled format for a few chapters once the heralds arrive at a given site.



from your library. Similarly, when you appoint a herald for your own Chantry, you'd better pick someone you trust, because he's going to be speaking and acting on behalf of everyone in your house — and you'll all be judged by his actions.

By age-old tradition, a herald is afforded shelter and succor within the walls of any Tradition Chantry. That means food, a place to crash and assistance in case of injury — a pretty cushy deal. What's the downside? It's a lot of work. Herald's carry messages, trade information and rites, establish meeting points, hammer out treaties and diplomacy, and have to worry about young hotheads getting fed up and slapping them around despite their supposed immunity. It's a busy job, but it's fun if you like spending time on the road.

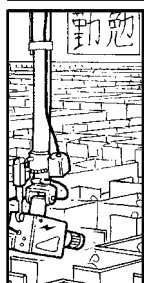
## HERALDIC PROTOCOL

There's just one major snag with their system of heralds: There's no formal protocol for heraldic recognition. Originally, heralds would wear an identifying

piece of clothing; the Order of Hermes' redcaps were famous messengers, for instance. The problem is that any heraldic protocol can be duplicated or forged, and this has led to innumerable problems, up to and including quislings opening the gates for Chantries so that they can be destroyed, as happened to Concordia.

At one point only a few years previously, the Euthanatos supposedly built a special staff as part of the proposed ambassador program. Imbued with powerful Entropy magic, the staff would lay the mark of Fate on a herald who undertook a herald's oath while holding the staff. Unfortunately, the staff was lost, and there simply aren't enough Masters around to lay a similar mark of Fate without it. A handful of "bonded heralds" still exist, and they can be detected as such by those who know what to look for, but until someone comes up with another clever system of marking heralds, the Traditions' ambassadors will just have to make do on diplomacy.

# LESSONS: A DITTE A DOZEN



In this new Cold War of sorts, the number of those who *think* they're qualified to teach has significantly risen. Unfortunately, the number of actual mentor-material mages has plummeted to near record lows. This is why the understanding of peoples' motives is very important to the Disciple mage. You see, the major aim of the Council now is to get the word out to as many potentials as possible, and the race to get the better Apprentice has made much of the "word-getting-out" business more a circus of idiocy than anything useful to those who walk the path. The quality of the lessons offered is sad, if not utterly horrible, if you ask me.

That being said, we must face it: A mage needs to get training somewhere. Seeking out the suitable trainer, then, becomes a grave concern of many Disciples, and rightfully so. How to go about such an activity, though, is little understood, and the resultant effect on Awakened society is a bunch of half-wits spouting lies and things they don't understand. Of course, doing so undermines the efforts of everyone else. Worry not, however, about the rest of the world. Where can you get the training you need? Let me give you some clues.

## Those With Potential

Often times, from the road of mere Apprenticeship to that of Disciple, mages are immediately recognized by their higher-ups as having great potential or a grand destiny

ahead. In spite of themselves, these lesser mages draw the attention of many would-be teachers, and they can find themselves the crux of some interesting rivalries. Herein lies the usefulness and danger of this type of mentor-search method. The mentor chooses you, rather than the other way around, and if the teacher is inappropriate, it may already be too late. However, mentors that can recognize your potential are often times wiser and more powerful than most, and thus the quality of the lessons may be better.

Of course, any mentor who comes to you may be rejected, upon your whim, but choose wisely who you keep and who you discard. Throw a respected Master out on his ear, so to speak, and your charisma in sorcerous society might just go along with him. By the same token, prepare to be mocked for the rest of your days, if you accept the tutelage of the wrong mentor. Hey, who said this was going to be easy?

Of your possible training situations, this one could be the least easy to generalize. Often, you find that you are afforded more room to be "human," or, better put, to dote around. Remember, the mentor came to you; you don't owe him any special favors. However, if this guy takes your "higher destiny" too seriously, prepare for a real hard-ass zealot with intentions to put you "where you want to be."

## Schooling by Circumstance

By far, the most common method Tradition mages use in acquiring knowledge and skill, schooling by circumstance is basically the training a mage receives



simply by belonging to a Tradition. Many times, though by no means exclusively, you will be tutored by the mage responsible for your initiation, giving you a kind of posh set-up from the start. He or she liked you enough to ask you to join the Traditions, so it's fairly certain that a good degree of respect exists between the two of you. This need not be the only case, naturally.

There are various tales that describe a young Awakened-type resenting the new world he's found himself in, and he ends up taking this animosity out on the world around him, particularly those responsible for his Awakening/initiation. Classic, yes, but disruptive and highly hated by mentors of every caliber. What a pity it is to crush such a self-motivated up-start before his time to shine comes....

The price of this Apprenticeship is simple but subtle. Basically, it involves building and maintaining a good standing with the particular Tradition to which you belong. Simple, yeah. The trick is to understand what is required in a Tradition to maintain "good standing," which varies from Tradition to Tradition, as is to be expected. It typically involves being a respectful, respectable and useful member of the society. What a useful member is, exactly, I'll cover in a later section.

### For Those of Higher Caliber

Let's take an instance that's becoming far too common in the Awakened world today. There you are, a prime example of what it is to be a Disciple-ranked mage. You've paid your dues to your Tradition; you've kissed all the right ass, even massaged some; you are exceptional in your chosen field of study, but you know there is more to it than what you understand already. You're a fine student to any mentor's delight, but there is a problem: The House, Chantry, cabal or whatever group you belong to is fresh out of Masters qualified to train you. Oh, what to do, what to do? I smell the need for one of those infamous quests mages are known to undertake. (Hurrah...?)

There are good mentors left in the Earth-plane; you just need to know where to look for them. The "where" in looking for them is usually dependent on the Tradition of the mage you seek. For one thing, the Masters of the Brotherhood live almost exclusively in the Orient, attending to the business of culture and the like. The only Akashic Masters in the West are middle-aged balding white guys who are fond of sphincter exercises (don't ask) and organic health foods. Celestial Masters are a lofty lot, found anywhere from the local church to the highest planes of the Umbras. Although humble to an utmost extreme, thereby hard to identify as Masters, Choristers are recognized by their characteristic of emanating bliss about them. (You'll know it when you feel it.) Cultist Masters have all but abandoned Earth,

and its legacy of restriction, although there are some who've stayed to "tend the flock." Like the Cult, the Master Dreamspeakers, too, have all but forgotten the flesh in lieu of the spirit. It is unknown if any Euthantos Masters still survive, many having been purged in the recent house-cleanings. Still, there seems to be no shortage of Disciples, so *someone* must be keeping them together. The Hermetic Masters not roaming the halls of Horizon or Doissetep will be found in Europe, almost exclusively. What they're planning, no one knows. The Sons of Ether — can *anyone* keep track of these guys? College campuses might be the right place to look... first. Verbena higher-ups like the hermit approach, sticking close to their beloved Earth, but far from the thoughts of man. Deep-hidden groves and grottoes within dense forests serve as good spots, as well as signs of mysterious Correspondence and Spirit Effect portals. The Virtual Adepts, with flesh chained to desks, souls to digital castles, are often too busy to be bothered, but a quick "big ego scan" in the DW will get good results. Finally, the Hollowers and other Orphans are typically forced to find a Master from one of the Traditions — seeing as there are few Hollow Masters to speak of — or they may opt for the following suggestion for training. But all things in their time.

Besides the Traditions, there are other Masters out there — beings spiritual and otherwise that could serve properly as mentors in the right situation. Spirits are the most common mentors for mages in need. Although they lack the flexibility of human tutors, they tend to exemplify knowledge in specific areas. A mage who's hard up for knowledge can go to a spirit for instruction. Even with the nastiness of the Gauntlet, spirits still tend to answer a proper call. There are also some strange creatures and artifacts out there that can impart magical knowledge. Sufficiently powerful libraries can help as well, but they are equally hard to come by. In short, a human tutor is still the best bet. Failing that, experience is your teacher, because the other options are rare.

Let's get into prices, now. As if it wasn't enough in the quest to find them, the reclusive Masters are prone to ask for hefty sums in exchange for training, and rarely does this cost refer to money. The exact nature of the cost to students is entirely dependent on the whim of the Master. Quests of valor, the retaining of services and the ownership of souls and shells are all possible costs to the eager Disciple (as are some things too bizarre to even mention). Just be warned. To drag these elders out of their own solitary form of training is perhaps more of a bother than anything they might ask of you. Know, too, that Masters are fond of pointing out that you got yourself into the mess, eagerly and willingly, no doubt.

Believe it or not, they have a sense of humor seemingly short of their years. Learn to enjoy it.

As a precaution, treat Masters in this situation with utmost respect. They see you as a straw dog, and they have many packs of matches just itching to burn.

### DESPERATELY SEEKING YODA

As the title of this sidebar implies, the search for a mentor is now up there in the quest story line. Your Storyteller may make it easy on you and give you a mentor gratis, but don't count on it. Here's what you can count on in a story centering around the hunt for a mentor:

- A little cabal conflict is inevitable. One of the mages wants to become a Master of Forces; another wants to learn Mind. Odds are, they won't find a Master of both, and they won't find separate Masters in the same place. Whose quest is more important?

- The Master can always ask a price that's just a little too high. Then, the Storyteller sticks the player over the barrel. "Your family is lost in servitude to the Nephandi unless you master this magic... but your teacher will demand your servitude once you're done." These dilemmas can be annoying, so they're better if they're moral dilemmas. Perhaps the character's family is in trouble unless he takes a *Nephandic* mentor....

- Tradition Masters who've survived the Reckoning often don't *want* to be found. After all, the Technocracy wiped out Doissetep. The surviving Masters are going to do their damndest to make sure that no other mages stumble across them! Although the characters may have heard about a given Master, there's no guarantee that they can *find* him unless they somehow earn his trust or draw him out, without even knowing who he is.

- What if the characters just aren't up to the Master's standards? They could find a Master, only to discover that he already has a student. Or that he won't teach them because of their Tradition, faction, or personal beliefs. Or perhaps their arrogant presumption in assuming that they somehow deserve such tutelage proves that they don't. In all such cases, the players have to use their roleplaying skills in order for their characters to convince the Master otherwise.

- What if the Master isn't up to the characters' standards? He could be a total jerk. Or self-absorbed. Or he might not have as much magical power as he claims. Or perhaps he's hunted by the Traditions, and his tutelage will taint the characters' reputations.

### The Long, Hard Road Alone

As the path of many mystics by choice and the road walked by most Orphans out of necessity, the solitary route is the most difficult. By its very nature, the road alone is a very personal thing, one I can't and won't try to describe for you. Its benefits and drawbacks, however, are rather easy to quantify.

First we'll take a look at the dark side of this lonely road. Obvious to most with formal training is the fact that you won't see what you're doing as wrong until it is too late, supposing, of course, that what you were doing was wrong in the first place. This drawback illustrates one of the boons that having a teacher provides. A teacher has already been down the road, and he knows where not to turn and what sights are worth seeing. The loner doesn't have this foreknowledge, and, consequently, he is prone to falling in the ditch or otherwise ending up stuck in the equivalent of a tourist trap.

Another con is the starting from scratch bit. Formally trained students have a wealth of knowledge accessible to them, in the form of a tidy-tutor-brain and the undoubtedly vast libraries a Master keeps. Aside from the possible library, a solitary has these not, and will suffer from the fact, should he not be creative. In a very real sense, the solitary is responsible for creating his own one-man Tradition, complete with paradigm and style. This facet of Awakened experience borders on beneficial, but the mage is forced to work against his own disbelief and lack of self-confidence, a charge few can withstand for long. It is this fact here that sends many a foolish brave-heart running back to the protective wing of a Master, whose methods are known to work and are backed by the boon of experience. Reminds me of a saying my mentor told me often: "Experience can be your best friend or your worst enemy. Depends on how you view your memory." Trust me, it's deeper than it sounds.

Next, I'd guess the logical step would be to examine the solitary's road in the positive light, and that's just what I'll do. The immediate benefit that jumps into the minds of almost all who consider the solitary path is the lack of an overbearing mentor. In fact, the lure of never again having to deal with a pompous pontiff turns many to this road. Let's be honest. Most of the mentors available to the Disciple aren't worth the trouble they pose, and even fewer are worthy of the respect they demand. That aside, take a look at the real endearing aspects of the solitary path. Willpower. A mage in this world needs will to survive, and there is no shortage of confidence for those who can walk the lone road successfully. Its converse is as devastating as the good is good, though, so this aspect is a toss up.



Paradigm, the building block of any reality, is another interesting benefit of this choice. You, for all intents and purposes, have free reign over the cause and effect of your world, should you disdain the teachings available. The hard part here, the only real difficulty of the solitary path, is convincing yourself that you have this power. Experiment and experience is the only route one has to learn with, which often turns many away from the hermit life. You actually have to try new things, which scares the hell out of half of you.

For the creative, the lone road is paradise. You have no mentor saying, "You can't do that!" with no good reason

other than the maintenance of tradition. For the dull, however, it's hell. You have no mentor telling you, "If you do X, Y will happen." Either way, it's your call whether or not this is a good thing. However, keep in mind that, should you actually erect and maintain a working paradigm, the smile on your face will rival the beaming sun. And you won't have to take shit from anybody.

The price of this path is one of sacrifice. You end up needing to abandon much of your old ways, pursue many dead leads and spend time in failure and self-pity. The rewards, as I have said, are out of this Tellurian, though. Again, the choice is yours.

### IT'S ALL ON PAGE XX

Characters who want to go it alone have a tough time ahead. Generally, learning the Spheres is a difficult undertaking normally. Discovering them through self-tutoring, practice and reading is even harder. But that's where the *Library* Background becomes invaluable.

In earlier editions of *Mage*, the *Library* Background was useful for reducing the experience costs associated with Sphere advancement. You can still do that, if you like, but it doesn't really showcase the difference between learning a Sphere with a tutor and learning it with a book. In some cases under such a system, using a library is preferable to having a teacher!

Storytellers should remember that developing the Spheres takes a *long* time. As a rule of thumb, you can use the times below, or you can establish your own baselines:

- 1 month (30 days)
- 6 months (90 days)
- 1 year
- 5 years
- 10 years

These times may seem rather lengthy, and they are. One doesn't master magic overnight. However, they don't refer to exclusive study; it's not like the mage has to sit sequestered in a Sanctum for a full year doing nothing but studying. Rather, it refers to time that the mage must engage in moderate study, practice and general familiarity with the Sphere in question.

To simulate the effects of the *Library* Background, you can let the player roll his *Library* rating against a

difficulty of [the desired Sphere rating +3]. Successes divide into the time needed to learn the Sphere. One success means that it takes the base time; two successes, halve the base time; three successes cut it to one-third, and so on. A failure indicates that the library doesn't have the materials and information necessary for the character to improve that Sphere using that library, while a botch indicates that the character somehow damaged the library or ruined his research in a spectacular fashion.

Conversely, a mentor is much more effective in teaching Sphere knowledge in a shorter period of time, but the mentor is not guaranteed to know the right Sphere, to always be willing or able to help or to do the job for free. Use the *Mentor* Background against the same difficulty, with each success halving the learning time. (One success equals half base time, two equals one-quarter time, and so on.) However, the mentor will naturally demand some favor of the student. A failure on the roll indicates that the mentor does not have the appropriate knowledge, or is unwilling to help. A botched roll means that the character has alienated her mentor.

If using a library and a mentor both, roll for each separately and take the best result. A good mentor is better than books, while really good research material is better than a crummy teacher. Add one to the final result as long as both rolls succeeded. (Therefore, if you score two successes on a *Mentor* roll and one on a *Library* roll, it's considered a three-success *Mentor* roll.) Of course, you run the risk of botching on either roll, and your character still has to pay his mentor for the services.





# CHAPTER FOUR: A MAGICAL WORLD

K -

Lee Ann and her motley assemblage seem to turn up more and more these days. Given their previous work for Initiates, I'm not entirely surprised. I sometimes wonder what would happen if Lee Ann and Mark actually crossed paths, but it's probably best that we don't know. In any case, these tales are handed down through what could be considered a sort of 'magician subculture,' and they offer some good insights on dealing with the rest of the magical dangers of the world.

I suppose I should qualify: Far too many mages delve directly into other magical angles in hopes of securing some sort of unique power or knowledge. We of all people should be aware of the dangers of the unknown. I suspect that this sort of foolishness will only become more common these days. With the desperation that's influenced many Traditionalists, a lot may turn to less reliable avenues of research, like dealings with vampires or quests to shatter the Gauntlet or whatnot. To which I say: Save the ones you can; dump the ones you can't. We've got enough problems without worrying about rampant stupidity.

Consider these tales like Uncle Remus stories for magicians: a lesson from a simple tale. Our first tale comes from one of my acquaintances who swears it's direct from Lee Ann herself.

- X.

# THE QUEST



Lee Ann looked around her at the alien surroundings in which she was standing. It was unlike any place that she'd been before. Barren, flat, like a desert that stretched forever.

This setting was nothing new to her. She'd been on several Seekings before. The "Old Lady" brought her to some mental landscape, then tested her, then expected her to learn a lesson. Or, rather, that's usually what she did. There'd been once or twice... but that wasn't the thought for now.

The "Old Lady" was the term Lee Ann used for her higher self, what some called the Avatar. She'd never actually seen her before. She had felt her prompting, quite strong at times, and sometimes heard a voice. It didn't sound old, per se, but she had been around a long time. Hence the name.

Lee Ann took stock of her surroundings, like any sufficiently inquisitive mage would. Any time, something would appear, or happen, or attack. She would find a way to deal with it, and then she would learn a lesson. And then, it would be over, and Lee Ann would rejoin the real world again. Simple, as always.

Any time.

Any time.

Any time...

Lee Ann looked around. This was wrong — something was... inaccurate? It was off. The Old Lady should have appeared.

Lee Ann thought back to her day until now. Had she flubbed a spell? Is that what caused this? Had the magic trapped her in her own mind?

No, she didn't think so. She'd felt Quiet before, and it wasn't quite like this. Besides, it was the beginning of the day. The first thing she did was follow through with her meditation, center herself and let her mind clear for the work ahead. She'd let the Old Lady guide her, if necessary, or just relax and let her cares and worries float away. She hadn't done anything else.

"Duh!"

The voice caused Lee Ann to spin. It was about time.

"Okay, come out come out, where ever you are," she called.

Nothing.

"Hello!" she shouted, now somewhat put out.

Still nothing.

Lee Ann sighed and pushed her hand through her hair, as she usually did when she was frustrated.

"Hello, already. What do you want?" she insisted. She wasn't sure what game the Old Lady was playing — although game was probably a misnomer — but she wanted to get on with it.

"You're the one who came here," answered the disembodied voice.

"Duh," Lee Ann replied, looking around. Nothing had changed. No one had appeared. Lee Ann was sure she was talking to the Old Lady, but the voice sounded a little different.

Not different — impatient. The Old Lady sounded impatient. Lee Ann had never heard the Old Lady when she was impatient, but she had felt her. It always annoyed her.

"We've been there already. What do you want?" the voice taunted smoothly.

Lee Ann shook her head, letting her body shake limply with it — another thing she did when she was irritated. "I'm here to learn. What do I usually come here for? I come here. You do something, and I learn."

"Is that how you think life is? That you just sit and wait for something to happen? My dear, you have a lot to learn. And not just by waiting for me to tell you," the voice admonished.

And with that, there was silence.

Lee Ann growled. That bitch. How dare she toss her into a mindscape without even a *hint* of a quest?

Of course, this wasn't exactly a Quiet episode or a psychotic break. For one, Lee Ann was fairly confident that she was thinking straight. She began reciting lines from her favorite comic books and movies. When she wasn't mixing them up, she was sure of that.

So, she'd just been abandoned then?

Well, she didn't like that.

Lee Ann sat down. The Old Lady would show. Something would happen, and she would show. She cleared out the rattling thoughts in her mind, bled off the anger and annoyance, and let her thoughts drift. She'd wait and right when her thoughts had drifted into a dreamlike obscurity where she was totally disconnected from the passage of time, the Old Lady would pop up. Lee Ann was sure of that.

Very sure.

The first hour.

And the second hour.



She was a little dubious the third hour.

The fourth hour she thought she saw something, but it was only something that her mind had fabricated.

By the fifth hour, she was beginning to wonder.

By the sixth hour, she was sure. The Old Lady wasn't going to show.

So, in hour seven, Lee Ann stood up, dusted off her butt, and started walking. She would have to find something, some time. She figured she'd been walking an hour or two, when she finally did find something. Or rather, she found some *one*.

The woman was beautiful, with flowing amber hair and delicate ivory skin. She wore a green dress that seemed to be woven from a primordial forest. Her eyes were green and shone like stars. About her, in sort of a halo effect, was a phoenix — almost like a tangible aura.

"It's about time," the woman said.

Lee Ann simply looked at her. She'd been expecting something a little more pronounced. A riddle, perhaps, or a cryptic prophecy; maybe a challenge, or a problem to be solved. Lee Ann thrust her hands on her hips and regarded the woman coolly, then cocked her head before speaking. "You're the Old Lady?" she asked.

"Don't look so surprised. You've seen me before, though you don't remember it," she smiled a gentle smile that made Lee Ann feel like she was eight years old, spending a summer with her aunt in Collier, Louisiana. "And I don't like being called Old Lady."

"Oh," Lee Ann looked down. "What should I call you, then?"

"Callisandra is fine. That was our first name. My first incarnation, and your first life."

"You're not me?"

K. —

*I'd always been under the impression that the Avatar was not really self-aware, but there do seem to be exceptions. If Lee Ann's story is true, it just adds another layer to that mystery.*

*This begs several questions: Do Avatars sometimes spring into existence fully aware, as Lee Ann claims, or do they all need time and experience to grow? And Callisandra isn't exactly a name from the ancient world; that would suggest that this Avatar in particular is more recent — newly formed? Or did it somehow lose its previous memories?*

*Fodder for the Avatar theorists. Me, I suppose I will simply take the Avatar at face value and get on with the business of magic.*

— X.

"Yes, and no. I am you, a part of you, and apart from you. When you die, I will continue on, and when you are joined to this world again, I will find you and I will rest in you until you are ready again."

"Always?"

"Until we are truly one."

Lee Ann gave a long whistle. "So, what's up with this, already? The letting me come in and not giving me a challenge?"

"Didn't I?"

"No," Lee Ann said. "You didn't do anything, except taunt me. Where's the challenge?"

Callisandra's face lit up, and she pointed behind her. A dragon with three heads slumbered. Like some beast out of Herculean nightmare, the creature was a magnificent and terrible, scaled and fiery. Its heads had twisted about on sinuous necks to make a comfortable position to sleep, but also to catch stray sounds from various directions. The body of the thing was lithe and snake-like, with slender but powerful limbs. Fringed bones rose from over the eyes — four eyes on each head, spaced about evenly — as the creature dozed fitfully. It could have been a symbol, a metaphor for any number of things: the heads taken in threes, the beast as a physical challenge, perhaps a riddling monster or a quest regarding something that was not as it appeared.

Callisandra simply watched the dragon for a moment. "That was it, but it got bored."

Lee Ann's mouth dropped. "What?" was all she could say.

"That would have been your challenge, had you come looking, instead of simply waiting for the world to come to you." The dragon shifted in its slumber but seemed distant, less important. Clearly, it wasn't waking any time soon, nor would it be challenging Lee Ann to any epic duels or puzzles.

Lee Ann shook her head, not really following.

"You've become stagnant. You've become so caught up in being a Cultist that you've forgotten what it is to be a mage. You don't live your life waiting for experiences. You seek them out. Well, you're supposed to." Callisandra folded her hands and waited for Lee Ann to digest this.

Lee Ann thought a moment. She thought about how she'd been since her Awakening. Callisandra was right. She spent her time waiting for signs or visions, or simply letting things happen around her. While that was good for some things, she could count on one hand how many things she'd done in the last two years that made a difference. Waiting might have been good when she

didn't know what she was doing or what *needed* doing, while she was still an Apprentice —

"But you're not an Apprentice any more," Callisandra interrupted in the midst of Lee Ann's thoughts. "It's time to start looking." Callisandra waved her hand. Where the dragon was, three paths appeared. "Choose one," she said.

"How will I know which one is right?" Lee Ann asked.

"You don't," Callisandra said. "And you won't for a long time. But really, it does not matter. It is not the destination, but the path that counts. We all come to the same end. It is the path that makes the difference in that end."

Lee Ann gasped as memory passed before her. She was a mage of light, then a mage of darkness. She was a mage of study, and in another a mage of abomination, twisted with an undying thirst. She loved a faerie king, and in another betrayed her fae kin. She fought beside wolf-men, and fed from their protectorates. She loved Ryan, or an incarnation of him, and killed him in another.

"Your lives have been good paths. Your lives have been bad paths. But in the end, they have been your paths. Each time you have chosen them. And each time, you have learned on them."

"So, now it's time to choose one," Lee Ann said.

Callisandra nodded.

Lee Ann turned to one of the roads. "Well," she said. "Here goes."

K. —

*Good advice! Lee Ann herself went on to learn from this, as the following work shows. This tale comes from the didactics of one of Lee Ann's friends — that Laurence bellows I think.*

— X.

## ALWAYS SEEKING

If you're reading this, then it's a safe assumption that you've been on a few Seekings and have a good idea of what they are. I know; when one assumes, that makes an ass out of you and me. Actually, they add an ass to u and me, but I digress. Besides, that's hardly my point. My point, is to talk about the Quest.

What is the Quest?

My, what a good question. Where should I begin?

Well, the Quest, whether you like it or not, is what you will spend the rest of your life doing. We call it the Quest in hopes of capturing some lost magical time, as if the wish will give us more power, or a sense of belonging in a world that is showing — increasingly I might add — that it does not want us. We, my friend, are the outsiders, the deviants, the freaks, so you might as well get used to it.

You can say that you're not going to fall to such archaic ideas as the Quest. You can say that you're independent, that you have your own way, your own purpose, and that you won't give in to the urgings of others, or Others.

Give it up. The Quest is not one set path you can take. No matter what advice, ideal or road you follow, you will always be on the Quest. No matter what your teachers told you, the Quest is nothing more than the path you walk for the rest of your life. What's the end? Who knows? Who cares? Do the ends ever justify the means, really? No. It's not the end that counts, but what you do to get there. And it won't be easy, no matter what you choose. You want to try and be normal? I wish you the best of luck. I'm going to give you a secret, one that will save you *a lot* of frustration. Living the "normal" life isn't what you think. You start it, and you find that when you get there, the only way to keep it is to constantly suppress what makes you different, so that you have to make yourself just like everyone else. Let's just say that, at this point, the normal life isn't as easy as you think. I really respect those who manage it and keep a sense of themselves.

I won't be so trite as to divide up the roads available to you. They are limitless. I have noticed, though, that they can be... categorized after a fashion, into three groups: corporeal, ascendant and destructive. That's what I call them. Some laugh at the division, others scream. Still, when I look at those who object to these classifications, I can't help but see how their *lives* agree nonetheless.

What do I mean? Well, the corporeal mage is the one concerned most with the real world and what is around him. Sometimes, these are the selfish ones, those who use their powers to amass greatness for themselves. Sometimes, though, they are very noble, using their powers to help those around them. These mages use their powers to feed the hungry. Some build shelters. Others fight crime or corruption. Some few just live their lives, and every once in a while, they do something to make the world around them a little better, or to make their own lives a little easier.



There are risks, to living that way. Discovery is the biggest one. Many say that discovery is nothing big, that they have enough power to protect themselves. Besides which, they can always make those around them understand.

I should remind you that while a single person is smart, and sometimes even reasonable, a mob of people is neither smart nor reasonable. You will not be able to persuade a mob that all is well and good, and that you are not a monster or the Devil incarnate. Then there are hunters and other mages. The corporeal mage is usually alone. Solitude can be dangerous to a mage.

So why choose that path? To many, it's the logical path to take. Ideas of Ascension are too abstract, and destruction, well... To put it plainly, it is what the mage is accustomed to. You've just found out that the world is a lot different than you thought it was. Sometimes, to keep yourself sane, you try to hold onto something familiar.

Then there are the ascendant mages. These mages seek something higher, some far-off goal. Sometimes, they are indistinguishable from the corporeal mages, as they work in the same avenues. The difference, though, is that the ascendant mages seek an ideal of existence. They don't usually do for others for others, but for the goal. For them, the world is a path, and if they do well, they will Ascend.

Ascendant mages come in all types, and they seek Ascension from any number of avenues. Some are Hermetic mages who work and learn in large intricate cabals and Chantries. Others are singular mages who seek the path alone. Some are renegade-like, who fight the good fight in hopes of reaching that higher existence. They come in all kinds.

These are mages who realize what they are and what they have been brought into, and they have embraced the ideals. They find their center in the questing, in the dynamics of their new lives. To them, returning to their "normal" lives would be, well, insane.

Then, there are the destructive mages. That's what I call them. No, I'm not just talking about Nephandi, although they are on my mind at the moment. But let's face it, the Nephandi aren't the only fallen mages; they are just the ones that your teachers scare you with the most. You can also, sometimes, fit Marauders into this group.

What I call destructive mages you can call many things. Nephandi, Marauders, the Bad Guys — call

them what you like, but they are the same in one important way: They all seek to destroy something for some twisted or insane goal. It may be the twisted Descent of the Nephandi, to plunge the world into chaos and nothingness. It may be the Marauder trying to break reality so as to reshape it to his will, to match his idea of reality. Or it could be the High Mage who is using his students and Disciples to shape the world to his image.

You see, we are taught the idea of Mass Ascension, that we will somehow lead the entire world into an Awakening, and that all will have a new higher enlightenment. While this goal is a noble one, it is also one full of temptation, with many paths to walk. All too often, I see mages take paths that lead them into darker and darker magic. It begins with a single compromise, a single time of forgetting the responsibility that power brings. When you do that, you start down a path that will lead to destruction, be it your own or someone else's.

Here's the thing about the darker paths: Any path can lead there. It comes down to one misstep, and you are on a path that you can not leave. So you have to be vigilant. You always have to watch, to ask yourself what it is that you are doing, and why. And you have to watch those around you, because I guarantee you that there is always someone waiting to take you down that path with them.

I know. I loved someone very much who tried to take me down with her. The day I discovered, was the hardest day of my life. And as tempted as I was to go, I had to make a decision. I had to remember my responsibility. For power, sometimes your freedom is the price. You can't make compromises like before. There is no room for it. There is no lesser evil for the greater good. So, no matter how tempting, you have to remember that. Do it, and you'll make it on the bitter road.

And yes, it is bitter. I remember that every day. But when I sleep, I sleep knowing that I'm doing the best I can, for the best reasons I can. I sleep knowing that I made the best decisions I could. And then I remember how tempted I was, and I decide what I will do to fight temptation tomorrow. Sometimes, if I get really scared, I make the phone call, to remind those I trust to watch me, so that I don't fall.

It is a bitter road, but I digress.

## MAGE STORIES BY TYPE

Although not all mages fall easily into Lawrence's definitions, many chronicles do. A chronicle's stories can easily be classified by corporeal, ascendant, or descendant themes — or by combinations of those.

### CORPOREAL MAGE HOOKS

By Lee Ann's definitions, most surviving modern mages pursue corporeal goals. A whole other chapter is devoted to their works — see Chapter Two. Many player mages will follow corporeal goals, or at least they should. Very few mages Awaken, without any previous life experience, friends, family or goals.

Corporeal mages run the risk of getting so caught up in minutiae that they lose track of the Ascension run. Although it's important to stay in touch with humanity and the world, there's such a thing as getting bogged down. A mage who gets ground down by the wear and tear of the world's hostility — stuck in the meat-grinder of charity work, personal intervention, constant demands and just trying to be the hero for too many needy people — can't get the perspective on the larger world.

For a player, corporeal demands form most of the interesting, everyday conflicts. Does the mage skip out on family to go traipsing off in the Umbra for an artifact? Does the mage stay behind to help a homeless shelter instead of learning greater levels of the Spheres? There's no wrong answer to these questions, as long as the mage is *doing* something. The real motive to look up is where the mage draws the line between the mystical and the mundane. What are the mage's priorities? Hopefully, you sorted this out during character creation and decided on your mage's ideals and direction. Just because your character Awakened doesn't mean that he has to give up his causes. Mages can be just as active in Greenpeace, the Republican Party or the local PTA as any other person. *Every* mage should have some sort of material, worldly hook that draws his attention.

For a Storyteller, corporeal hooks form the basis of down-to-earth games. Sure, a lot of fun can be had flying around in Etherships, blowing up Nephandi and making magical items. However, there's also fun in development of character through everyday problems. Which mage is in more trouble: the one who's facing down a lone Technocratic opponent,

or the one who's wanted by the whole FBI? Which excites more emotional intensity in the mage: the possibility of learning a little about a new Sphere, or the possibility of saving his childhood home from bulldozing?

Obviously, hooking into corporeal mages relies heavily on mundane Abilities and Backgrounds. Ideally, each player defines the specifics of his mage's *Influence* Background during character generation. For instance, a mage with *Resources* ••• must get the money from somewhere. Does the mage have a regular job? Then a story can be told of the conflicts between that job and the demands of magic (again, see Chapter Two). Does the mage want to make more money? Well, one can do so magically, but it's more fun to tell a story of how the mage gets an emotional investment out of building up something mundane, such as starting a nightclub, founding a political movement or making a new company. The mage needs Abilities in order to do so, not just Spheres. A powerful story can be told by focusing on one mundane development — getting involved in a land deal, perhaps or trying to clean up the streets — and making the mages really work with their appropriate Abilities (maybe Politics, Streetwise or something of the sort) to make it happen.

Just because corporeal mages focus on the material world doesn't mean that they have less entertaining things to do!

### ASCENDANT STORIES

Mages who follow the ascendant path tend to go out into the cosmos with the idea of finding tools for enlightenment and magical power. They're the ones who dive into the Umbra, speak with spirits, build Talismans and generally flex their magical muscles. Sure, there are a few navel-gazers, but contemplation by itself doesn't cut the mustard. Mages are dynamic, and they need to be in action!

A lot of groups start out with very ascendant goals. After all, it takes time to dive into a character concept; it's easier to focus on the unique and strange parts, and go from there. Mages often get involved in ideological conflict, magical warfare, study and stargazing. The ascendant road should eventually run into the corporeal one, though. As we keep trying to hammer on here, mages have personalities beyond their magical powers.



A mage cannot spend *all* of his time in the pursuit of magical knowledge. That sort of single-minded dedication, ironically, closes the door to broader understanding (see **Masters of the Art**). The mage must balance the demands of magic with the needs of being human.

For a player, the ascendant path is not too difficult to run, but it isn't always as rewarding in terms of rich character development. There is nothing wrong with developing Spheres and Arete, overcoming foci, expanding paradigm and improving magical Backgrounds. However, there is more to the character than dots, so play it up. When presented with the opportunity to dive deeper into magic, you (the player) should always remember that magic also changes the mage. How does your character see the process of development? Does he truly think that external items and tomes of knowledge will open the door to Ascension, or does he focus solely on an inward journey? The mage is part of the world, and he must accept the world into himself in order to Ascend. As much can be learned about a character by what he denies as by what he pursues.

(Before some people get up in arms, we aren't telling you that you have to play **Mage** without pursuing magic. We're just reminding you that rich character development can obviously come from things *other* than the pursuit of magic, or else other games like **Vampire** and **Werewolf** obviously wouldn't have any characterization for you. The powers are neat, but don't get caught in the trap of seeing the character solely in terms of powers. On the other hand, you can have a rewarding roleplaying experience with a "powerful" character; such individuals often have larger problems and more dramatic foes.)

For a Storyteller, the ascendant path gives an opportunity to showcase all the vibrant variety of the **Mage** setting. Players can go to Umbral Realms, talk with lost Masters and spirits, seek out magic artifacts and places, and generally experience all of the really nifty mysticism of the setting. The most important caveat is the reminder that these elements of setting *do not* make up a story by themselves. Tibet can be a nice place to visit with lots of eye candy, but you need to have a reason for the characters to go there and do something, for instance. When running ascendant-path games, focus on more than just a constant end-run for bigger

and better magic. Otherwise, you're playing just another "blow stuff up and take the treasure" game.

A good tip is to play with the *ideas* behind a particular ascendant story line, tied to the *things*. Thus, if you decide that you want the mages to go after a powerful magical item, remember that the item, like the characters, doesn't exist in a vacuum. Where did it come from? Why is it important? What are the consequences if the characters fail to get it? Ideally, the path should be a learning experience, not just the end. Players can have a great deal of fun just engaging in philosophical debate and ideology. Try pitting the players in a situation where the Technocracy is doing something that's *right*, and the players have to decide whether fighting the Technocracy to weaken its overall power is worth the price of setting something wrong. Or throw out a potent mystic artifact and toss a ubiquitous curse on it; is the pursuit of power worth its price? Heck, try spending a game where some old Master shows up and bequeaths his library to the mage with the best argument for/ against/ supporting/ decrying some philosophy. Let the players sweat out what their characters really believe and why, and argue about what's right, what's wrong, what's objective and what they should do.

## DESTRUCTIVE IMAGES AND YOU

There are really two categories of "destructive mage" in play. The first kind are adversaries — those who provide conflict to drive the game, by fighting against the players' mages' ideals, destroying important structures and pursuing madness or Descent. The second kind are those who are destructive to the game as an enjoyable pastime. They include rules lawyers, players of Euthanatoi who bully and kill the rest of the group while the players claim, "I was acting according to my roleplaying paradigm" and mages who just want to whack enemies and never explore a real identity. You know the types.

Class-two destructives aren't what this information deals with — just tell them to shape up or take a hike. The game is supposed to be a fun pastime for *everyone* involved, and people who have nothing better to do than to derail the game or force it onto a one-track course are not doing any favors. Storytellers, watch carefully to make sure that players of destructive characters are doing so in ways that advance the story and provide entertaining conflict instead of making pointless frustration!



The first type of destructive mages... ah, they are the chaos around which the game revolves. Every mage has some destructive impulses. It comes with the territory. Mages tear down those things with which they don't agree, fight those who would attack their beliefs and squabble over limited resources. As players' mages, they can be a heck of a lot of fun. A destructive mage doesn't have to be one that goes out of his way to whack people or blow up the group's harmony. He can be a mage who just has some compromise that has tarnished him — a slight flaw in his character, as it were. From there, the mage has opened the door to conflict, but from that conflict the character can overcome his problems and advance. A character without conflict is stagnant, after all! Destructive character hooks give you *great* opportunities for Seekings and advancement. Overcome your character's drug habit. Get your mage's temper in check. Find a way to cast off that nasty little Infernal deal you made as a reckless youth. Destructive bits are tailor-made for story arcs, and they guarantee that your Storyteller will have a Seeking for you.

Some Storytellers introducing destructive mages into the game tend to class them as "Bad Guys" (such as Marauders, Nephandi and Technocrats) who need to be fought. A better idea is to introduce destructive *themes* and let the characters stem from that. Play around with the themes of corruption, redemption, violence and enforcement of will, then toss in a character who exemplifies the theme — or, better still, causes the players' mages to take up that role. For instance, you could give the players a bunch of mindless little demons to kill. Not a great story hook... but what about when they start wondering about how their acceptance of violence as a solution is changing them? Do they compromise and stop fighting evil, or do they shoulder the burden of committing sin to defend the innocent? Play up the idea that no belief in **Mage** is *wrong*, although some courses of action have better results than others. A clever Storyteller keeps notes of these outcomes and lets them come back to haunt the players later. Perhaps the actions of their impulsive youths cause problems in the future, or maybe what was a good solution for one problem isn't so good for another ("We kill this demon, but we let that one live..."). Entice the players to think, doubt, question and compromise as a matter of course.

My point is, we have many roads we must take, and many choices to make, and if you want to stay true to yourself you have to be vigilant. You have no idea how easy it is to stray, to compromise, to fall to pride or destruction. I dare say, despite the fact that mages tend to be extremely strong-willed, at least as they progress, we probably have a harder time with it than the normal person.

Daring, aren't I? But it is true. Why? Because you aren't alone in that head of yours, that's why. If you haven't figured it out yet, you have something else alive in you. Well, maybe not alive. Perhaps I should say Awake. If you haven't figured that one out yet, you should probably go back to being an Apprentice for a while longer. You really aren't ready for the rest of this.

But chances are, you've felt it, maybe even seen it. You've probably gone through what we sometimes call Seekings (vision-quests work too), and you have probably encountered it directly there. What it is is something wondrous and — well, to be redundant — magical.

It is the personification of your magical essence. Its origins are only guessed at, and I leave it to the Hermetics to determine. I personally do not care where mine is from. The only thing that concerns me is that it is with me now. It is, I suppose, the eternal part of my soul, the part that carries on forever. When I die, it will find another person to inhabit. It will carry with it parts of my life, and in it, I become eternal. (We're getting my views on reincarnation, I know.)

The Avatar is what gives us our magic. Remember how the Awakening was explained to you by your mentor, that you Awakened to your powers, hence the common terminology? Well, that is and is not true. That's the short-hand explanation. In truth, it is your Avatar that Awakens. You see, when an Avatar finds a soul to inhabit, it sleeps. When the soul is ready, or something else triggers it, it will Awaken, and that soul can learn to access its magic. The Avatar is a part of you, and it needs you as much as you need it. Without it, you have no magic. Without you, it has no form.

Avatars are eternal things. They were here at creation, and they will be here unto the end. Only Gilgul can destroy an Avatar, and that punishment is reserved for only the truly fallen, those who will not be redeemed in a new life. I won't discuss Gilgul further. The very idea of it chills me. I will not say it revolts me, though. I have seen in a life or



K —

*On a more recent note, the 'Avatar Storm' that's been causing so much trouble with the Umbra seems to have occasional dangerous effects on Avatars. I've heard of mages completely losing their Avatars to the storm winds. Possibly hyperbole, but one can never be too careful.*

— X.

three where it is necessary, unfortunately. It is the importance of your choices.

As I said — before getting off my point yet again — Avatars are eternal beings. They take their focus and power from four distinct things. These are also how they often drive their mages. I call them the Essences, or sometimes the Source. Understanding the source of your Avatar's power means a lot in growing as a mage.

The first is the Primordial, commonly named because it tends to draw its power and focus from the beginning and the end. Primordial Avatars are less concerned with the here and now and more with the overall picture. They are the hardest of the Avatars to comprehend, and I think that is why so many of their mages fall to being *Barabbi*. Those who do not fall tend to foster mages with creative energies and focus. Some of the most powerful and fierce mages have been of the Primordial Essence.

Then there is the Dynamic. These guys seem to be all about change. They take the primordial idea of birth, death and rebirth, and they focus on that, applying it to all things. For the Dynamic Avatar, there is a time for all things, and when the time for this thing is passed, they move on to another thing. By the way, that does not always mean when something is completed. These Avatars can be aggravating when they are trying to pull a mage from a task he has hardly begun, all because it is ready to move on. The mages can be equally aggravating to work with. Like the Primordial Avatars, the drives of these mages can be hard to comprehend, and many mages trying to keep pace have lost their minds, falling into the eternal quiet that is the life of a Marauder. Still, a Dynamic mage can be formidable. It is not always that he is extremely powerful in one Realm. It is that he has many Realms at his disposal.

Following that in progression is the Questing Avatar. These Avatars focus on the cycles, turning a cycle into a quest, and seeing it through from beginning to end. Neither point matters much.

Only the road does to these Avatars, and their mages tend to be the same. These Avatars are much easier to comprehend, and they produce mages who tend to focus more on the spiritual than the material. After all, it is not the gain that matters, but the road, for it is the road that has the sites that teach us. Most mages tend to be of this cast. They are also quite successful. Like the Primordial mages, they also tend to become very powerful, sometimes extremely powerful in multiple areas.

The most stable of all the Essences, and the most successful in this day and age, are the Pattern Avatars. These Avatars take the Quest and focus on the beginning and ending points. To the Pattern Avatar, what matters is to build and secure. These are the easiest for a mage to comprehend by far, for they come closest to human materialism. Mages of this Essence tend to focus on the here and now and what the end of a quest will bring. They are also less concerned with the metaphysical aspects of magic, finding their magic much more successful if they are able to tie it into a mundane activity. Well, not always mundane. Many Virtual Adepts are Pattern mages. Few of them are mundane (although I know Lee Ann usually disagrees). The Technocracy is made up almost completely of Pattern mages — that is my experience, anyway. For the Pattern mage, order is very important. It comes from the Avatar's focus.

Those Essences are how the Avatars guide us. Their wishes are not always our own, and it is when conflict arises that things become difficult. What makes it worse is that their prompting is not always right. We often find ourselves in situations where we know what has to be done, yet we feel a pull to do something completely opposite of that. It's usually quite aggravating, and it has led many mages to failure.

By the same token, a mage who fights his Avatar too much finds himself in the same end. We find ourselves in a situation where we *think* we know what we should do, and we feel the pull to do something else. We do not listen, and in the end, we step off our path.

The key to understanding the Avatar lies in the tool the Avatars give us to progress: the Seeking. By now, you probably understand that when you get pulled into the Seeking, your Avatar is testing you to see if you are ready to wield more power. These Seekings are commonly vision-quests, but

I have heard of them taking more mundane forms as well, and the mage not even aware that he is in the midst of one.

That is all well and good. Now, follow me here, the Seeking is more than just a time to gain more power. It is also a time to learn. Not just of your powers, but of your inner self, your Avatar, and to gain a deeper understanding of your own hidden drives.

It is very important to learn how to determine if you are on a Seeking. That is not easy, but there are things to alert you. The situation almost always requires something more than what you often give — it steps outside your comfort zone, testing and pushing you deliberately. It will also challenge you, your thoughts and your feelings. It will almost always reflect the path you have chosen to walk.

When you are here, pay attention to the Avatar. What are the elements of the Seeking? What is it you have to accomplish or learn? What is there to pick up on as you go? Different Essences will test you in different ways. What has been the focus of past Seekings? Do they take the shape of quests? If so, is the quest or the end more important? Do your Seekings tend to reflect ideas of change? Do they encompass eternal ideals, or do they focus on the here and now? These questions will help you understand your Avatar and clue into how the Avatar thinks. How much of a grasp does it have on the world you interact with?

Even if you are not in a Seeking, you can still think on these things in any situation in which you have felt the Avatar's pull. You should also take the time to meditate, to focus on the Avatar. Meditation is often our most direct communication. The relationship you have with the Avatar is like any relationship. It requires communication to work. Make known to it what you wish, and let it make its wishes known to you. In doing so, you will find that you can often make your relationship with your Avatar much better. It is, after all, a being that must cohabitate with you.





## GOING WITH THE MINDLESS SPIRITUALITY

Seekings do move outside a mage's experiences and comfortable places. They can take on strange forms and surreal landscapes that have the consistency of a dream-world — but they make perfect sense to the mage in context to his advancement. At least they do in retrospect. Usually.

Seekings can be left to a few dice rolls but that's doing a grave disservice to the potential for roleplaying and character-development. Instead, a Seeking should be handcrafted, built to suit, there to challenge the character's notions.

Oh, and challenging the player's notions is possible, too. Just don't move outside the bounds of fun and playability. It's one thing to horrify the character, or force him into a psychological conflict. It's another thing entirely to do it to a player, and it's not at all fun. Make sure that you know your players' lines before you accidentally cross them.

Playing through a Seeking is a great way to explore your mage's self-imposed limitations and what your mage needs to learn. Many mages have boundaries that they can't or won't cross. A Seeking always forces a mage to jump through some of these hoops. However, in the true fashion of the talkative hero, there's nothing wrong with your mage bitching about the problem first! As a player, you may recognize the shortcoming of your mage and quickly find a way to solve his problem. However, try to approach the Seeking in terms of your mage's thoughts on the matter. Is your mage a racist? Then resolving that foible may be important, but what challenge could cause your mage to do so? If your mage *believes* something with the same conviction that he brings to magical practice, then he's at loggerheads. Your mage must find some decisive event or philosophy that causes a massive change in his view of life — which is what the Seeking is all about.

This event, in turn, drives the mage to more learning. A mage who has a squeamish dread of death, for instance, may need to learn about and accept death, by delving into medicine, morbid philosophy and a hands-on exploration of age. Dig into the roots of your mage's fears and problems. You can not only get a Seeking out of it, but if you're lucky, you can get your Storyteller to approve some

new Abilities or Backgrounds. Not bad, as a bonus on top of a chance to really see your character's personality shine.

Storytellers of Seekings take note. A Seeking builds around a single character's problems and means of advancement. While a Seeking may be worthy of a story in its own right, it can be really boring for the other players as they sit around and watch. A couple ways around this pitfall include:

*Personal Seeking games.* It's a real hit on your time, but you can call up your player and say, "I want to run your Seeking one-on-one." The level of personal interaction is similar to a prelude. This Seeking method is a good one if you've mapped out an intricate Seeking but you don't have anything else for the other players to do.

*Group Seekings.* In some bizarre mindscape, the entire group could wind up in one mage's Seeking. The important thing to watch out for is other players solving their friend's Seeking. Seekings are about personal resolution, so even if someone else in the group kills the dragon, that doesn't necessarily mean that the Seeking mage has learned anything from it. Ideally, the Seeking should focus on ideas and fears that the mage must resolve personally, but friends can help. If you have a particular metaphysic that permits it, you might throw together a whole story around multiple characters triggered into one Seeking as a group, where they must resolve personal and group issues. Group Seekings are also appropriate for mages with circumspect Avatars (see **Mage: The Ascension** p. 294), who have to do things through real-world practice instead of mindscapes.

*Seeking Guides.* Borrowing a page from **Wraith**, you can craft the Seeking in advance, then pull the other players aside and give them roles to play for the Seeking. The mage's friends might show up but behave in strange ways. (Perhaps one betrays her, and she has to decide how to respond.) Or the players could take on totally different roles. This is a great chance for your players to try on suits as spirits, demons, dragons, mentors, long-lost characters or anything weird and strange. The important point here is to watch for players who vindictively try to spoil or hog the Seeking, or to solve it for their friend. Explain clearly that the players are there to help guide the



story, not to be the center of it. This is also a nice way for an otherwise quiet or peripheral player to get a game in which her character is central to the story, but the other players still get to participate in supporting roles. In such a case, you may even want to give the other players a couple of experience points for their normal characters, just for being sports about the whole deal — but insist that their characters must learn something from the story of the Seeking as related by the primary mage.

### CRAFTING A PERSONALIZED SEEKING

So what do you use as a Storyteller when putting together a Seeking, and how much input does the player get, anyway?

Well, a good Seeking is — like anything else — part of the game for fun. Thus, it needs to be something that the player will enjoy doing, and that the Storyteller will enjoy running. At the same time, it needs to address all of the mage's little foibles, as noted in the more generic Seeking material of *Mage*.

- **Player Pursuits:** Hopefully, the player has a direction desired for the mage — anything from “become an Archmaster” to “learn another dot of Brawl.” A Seeking can give some hints and guides about that path, or it can show the possible pitfalls of doing so. If a character uses Skills, he's naturally eligible to improve them. In a bizarre Seeking, a character may even find himself possessing knowledge or skills that he doesn't normally have. The player could use this discovery as a chance to develop the character in a new direction. *Anything* magical that the player wants to develop should be touched on. If a mage is working on Forces, for instance, the Seeking should probably include some element of puzzling or control over that Sphere, at a level that's beyond the mage's current reach. The mage must find a clever way to understand it, bypass it or affect it with his current knowledge.

- **Essence:** The Avatar Essence is often ignored, but a Seeking is a place where it can really make a difference. The Avatar's Essence defines, among other things, how the Avatar will make the Seeking happen. A Pattern Avatar tends to force the mage through a regimented series of steps: Complete small task, complete medium task, complete large task built from repetition of lesser tasks. Furthermore, Pattern mages often have to go through the same tests and trials each time they Seek in order to prove that they haven't backslid. (Such is true

of any Seeking, but more so for Pattern mages — sometimes to the point of annoyance for the mage.)

A Dynamic mage is the opposite. His Seeking seems to flick from one point to the next, with sudden changes of scenery and goal, and perhaps even a change in mid-action as the mage suddenly realizes that he no longer needs to do what he thought he did. Play up the alien nature of magical change, and pull the rug out from under the mage's feet to force him to react to rapidly changing situations. The mage may also have to come to terms with this dynamism in conflict with the more stable demands of his life, or accept the need for change and throwing out old things.

A Questing mage pursues some unseen goal that's always just on the horizon. Just as the mage completes the Seeking, he should get the sense that it's merely opened the door for another step. These Seekings may not be as orderly as Pattern ones, but they do involve a step-by-step process. The mage must travel from point A to point B and learn something, overcome something or accomplish something of significance. The quest is usually symbolic. The mage doesn't need to slay the dragon, so much as she needs to slay the dragon of her fear and ignorance.

Lastly, the Primordial Essence offers a chance to play truly eerie Seekings. The mage must get in touch with his roots, unlock past lives, look into painful childhood memories and discover secrets of his heritage. These secrets are usually unpleasant, but the mage must accept them. From there, the mage studies his foundations and questions his current direction — how did he grow into what he is today? What is the mage's relationship to his roots? These Seekings often involve a symbolic death and rebirth, or a destruction of things held dear. The mage must return to the beginning of the cycle, following the circular path of Primordialism.

- **Flaws:** A mage with Flaws is tailor-made for Seekings. The mage must come to terms with her shortcomings and difficulties. This process is not always a matter of *overcoming* the Flaws so much as *internalizing* them. A mage who's narrowed her vision — with hatred, for instance, or a dependency of some sort — must learn to move beyond it. The mage may have to deal without her metaphysical crutch, or overcome her lack of vision. Perhaps



she must suffer for her prejudices. A mage with physical handicaps must recognize them as part and parcel of her being. A one-legged mage, for instance, must come to acceptance of that state and realize that it does not make him any less human. He must suffer the temptations of overcoming that injury at the cost of magic — the realization that desire for physical things, that attachment to materialism, is a block to spiritual progress. Or perhaps he is offered the chance to be made whole without cost, and he must understand that *whole* is a state of personal acceptance, not a state of physicality.

- **Resonance:** Ah yes — just as Resonance colors the mage's spells, it also shapes the look and feel of a Seeking. Although Resonance should rarely actually hinder or help a Seeking, it gives the Storyteller a great handle for the appearance of it. A mage with the Entropic Resonance of *Chill* may often find his Seekings in cold desolation, with snow, or perhaps in worlds of people who have little emotion. With the Static Resonance of *Consistent*, perhaps there is some element — an image, a person, a sound, a smell — that always appears in a Seeking, in every place and task.

- **Completeness:** Many Storytellers approach Seekings as “yes-no” problems that the mage must overcome in a specific fashion in order to succeed. This factor is a formula for frustration if your players can't figure out what you're getting at, or if they hare off constantly in other directions. Instead, try to build the Seeking *qualitatively*. The mage needs to come to a new pinnacle of understanding. However, doing so does not necessarily go hand in hand with being a better person or overcoming a problem completely. Perhaps a compromise is effective, or maybe there are several ways to solve a problem satisfactorily. The way that the mage solves the problem can give great insight for later Seekings. A Seeking can also allow a mage to revisit an old issue and resolve it differently. Instead of saying, “You must jump over this chasm,” perhaps the mage must find a way to come to terms with his fear of heights in some other way. He may face it directly and overcome it, or he could skirt it, acknowledge it or fight it. Finally, he may simply realize that that fear is part of him and that he can still be human and be afraid.

And I believe I have come back to the Quest, which brings me full circle. For, if you understand the Avatar, the place of Seekings, then you can better walk that path you have chosen. Perhaps you will even succeed. Chances are you haven't done too bad so far.

If you're reading this and sweating some choices you made, then good. That means you still have a chance to get back on track. It's when you stop sweating the bad choices that you're really in trouble. But, I think that you're beginning to understand that now too, so I will be off.

As always, your devoted friend and secret mentor,  
Sir Lawrence White

## A Hermetic Discourse on the Avatar

by Lydia Everson, Order of Hermes, Disciple bani Bonisagus

*The origins of the Avatar have always been of some dispute. Like the existence of God Himself, they are doubted, dubbed and sometimes ignored. What follows are my findings on the idea of Avatars, their origins, beliefs on them and my experiences dealing with them.*

*Of the Avatar's Origins, Father Michael O'Reilly speaks:*

*“We believe that the Avatars are part of the Universal whole. We believe that all the souls were once one, and that long ago, they divided, placing themselves into the souls of men and sleeping. All have them, we believe, but not all of the Avatars are strong enough to Awaken on their own. We believe that there will come a Mass Ascension one day, and that all of them will Awaken. We believe this will be a most divine time. Of those that can Awaken, they will teach those whom they share the soul with of the powers and secrets of the universe. We believe that mages are very important in God's overall plan, and because of that importance we should both take care of all of his creatures, and that we should take care to temper our own powers and the uses of them.”*

While most certainly flavored with the Judeo-Christian bent, many of his words correspond with other spiritualists that I have spoken to regarding the Avatars. Obviously, not all of them agree on the cosmological source of the Avatars. Most of them feel that Avatars have the shared beginning (be it a single being



or a collective) and that they disbursed themselves among men.

I should note that there is a belief that men were created with Avatars, that they are a natural part of the soul. One Celestial Chorus mage I spoke to argued that the "Breath of Life" breathed into Adam was an Avatar, and it is from that Avatar that all of them come. Personally, I don't think that interpretation is too far from Father O'Reilly's, although this particular Chorister seemed to take offense when I made the suggestion.

I have found many others as well. Many of them are colored by spiritual beliefs, so I will not bother to discuss each of them in detail; the core elements are more important to this dissertation. The common link is the belief that the Avatars have a divine source of some kind. All agree that they are the source of our powers, and that without them, we would have no magic. The infallibility of them is questioned by some. Others consider the Avatars perfect, above the idea of corruption, although this assertion obviously begs the question of the corruptibility of the Avatars of Nephandi. Those who do accept a Nephandus both as an Avatar and that the Avatar is corrupt believe those Avatars to be akin to fallen angels. It is not surprising, then, that even those who know little of the Nephandi believe that they worship demons or dark powers of some sort.

I have also found that many mages are ignorant of the Avatar, its drives and its purposes. This fact is disturbing, as it is the Avatar that guides us. I have even found mages who do not believe that the Avatar exists as a separate being. This belief truly disturbs me. Many of these mages believe that the Avatar is simply part of their subconscious, that it has no separate existence. In some cases, this belief has little effect on the mage; in others, it affects greatly how they are able to access and use their powers. I think that in every case, it is dependent at least in part on the Essence of the Avatar.

Those who do not tend to put a divine meaning to the Avatars also do not tend to look too hard at their origins. They may agree that the Avatar is a separate being, or at least a separate part of the spirit, but they obviously place no divine meaning to it. They do not seem to suffer for this misconception, so it is my idea that the Avatars — with whatever consciousness they have — do not mind it, at least in the case of these mages. That finding tends to lend question to the divinity of Avatars and just what a divine origin means to them. Perhaps the fact that that they do not

seek recognition of it speaks to their humility. Perhaps they see more important matters with which to concern themselves.

I would hazard a guess, though, that if a Celestial Chorus mage doubted the divinity of an Avatar, her magic would suffer. I hypothesize, then, that the Avatars take shape partially based on the mage in question, not just on their Essence and cosmological origins. Indeed, some Avatars make demands of sacrifices or behavior patterns from their associated mages, and they seem able to enforce them. Others seem to exert no real power over their hosts. (I shall have to deduce a way to test this hypothesis, but that is a matter for later study.)

One common thread in those who recognize the existence of the Avatar is of the Avatar as a teacher. This teaching is not always welcomed, but most mages accept it. The door to power comes with metaphysical understanding and, as antinomian praxes show, this understanding is often tempered with undesirable elements or painful experiences. The idea of the Avatar as a guide is also prevalent, although it is not as widely accepted. It is the idea that the Avatar will direct the mage's course in life. Many mages tend to fight this idea. While it is certainly true in some cases, again, I find that it depends on the individual Avatar. Most Avatars seem content to allow their hosts to live out their mortal lives as desired, and they provide input during only rare quests of metaphysic importance. Indeed, the prevalence of Orphans who live out quiet lives without dalliance in mystic society bears out the assertion that few Avatars serve as actual guides for all life.

A more radical theory is the idea that the Avatar is simply a spirit familiar, or sometimes even a guardian spirit of sorts. This view is shared most by those who view the Avatars as simply Quintessential batteries. While they agree in the origin and purpose of Seekings, they do not see that teaching is the Avatar's role. They believe that Seekings are simply a test that the Avatar gives when it is indicated that it is time. Avatars do serve a guarding role, but the fact that mages cannot initiate Seekings under their own power seems to give credence to the notion that the Avatar must play a part in guiding the mage to enlightenment. Still, since Seekings often form from what could merely be elements of the subconscious, it is still possible that the Avatar is little more than a trigger or intermediary between the mage and greater understanding of her inner mind and spirit.



I have, on two occasions, attempted direct communication with the Avatars. Neither encounter went well. I believe that the Avatars take offense, and sometimes feel threatened, by a mage's attempts to communicate directly. I therefore do not suggest it, except in the most extreme of circumstances. Avatars do sometimes seek to communicate with other mages. I leave that to their discretion. Most often, the Avatar speaks solely to its host. A rare few manifest visually or physically, although this phenomenon is much more rare than it once was.

In the first instance, I attempted to speak with the Avatar of a Marauder. I never quite succeeded, and I am not sure why. What I received was a nearly month-long Quiet. Repetition of this experiment is not recommended. I discovered little of the nature of the Marauders, save that their Avatars do not seem to be as restrained as ours are. The idea that Marauders use their magic without worry for Backlash may be because their Avatars are free to direct that Backlash elsewhere.

In the second instance, I sought to find the truth behind the corruption of a Barabbus. This particular mage had been caught by my cabal, and she was being questioned. When she insisted that her Avatar drove her to her eventual end, I decided to test the veracity of her statement. I searched spiritually for her Avatar. Although her Avatar was present, it was apparently distorted in some form. Prime-sensing clearly showed that it had a radiance very different from most Avatars, although it had not been altered quantitatively.

I will not say that the Avatar enjoyed its state. It was clear that the Avatar had been twisted into a form that did not match its ideal nature, which obviously drove it (as a parapsychical construct) into some level of internal conflict. I do believe that the Avatar once had the representative form of a large cat, one of the wild Irish sort. It looked as if its skin had been turned inside out, while still on its body. It seemed to radiate a dark ichor. Most importantly, it was clearly incensed. Its interaction with Prime energy showed that it was much more active than most Avatars in its assertion over its host. Furthermore, there were indications of ties to other entities (q.v. "demons") in a fashion of direct communication that allowed the Avatar immediate interaction with them.

When I offered my aid, matters went poorly. While I doubt that this state was the one the Avatar sought to be in, it became quite apparent that it was here by collective effort. In its state, I do not think it understood being better. It showed me many instances where it had fallen to the Nephandi's Cauls (a reference I am still researching). When I offered to ensure that it would not happen again, it attacked me outright, through a manifestation of spontaneous magic on the part of its host.

In the end, we had no choice but to sentence the Barabbus to Gilgul. The Avatar had been corrupted so many times that its twisted state had, sadly, become the only state that it understood. Still, I think I understand why it sought such corruption. In that state, it existed in a sort of chaotic madness that could spawn nearly any idea. I do believe that the Barabbus' Avatar was Primordial, and that what the Avatar sought was the primordial beginnings from which it was born.

Lydia Everson continued to research the truth of the Barabbi, seeking knowledge that would help the Traditions to battle them. The above discourse is the last thing she ever delivered formally, although many notes exist. She was killed by combined efforts of Order of Hermes and Euthanatos mages after she became Barabbus herself.

— SLW



## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR AVATAR

Most players see the Avatar as a convenient little metaphysical hook, a background bit of “what makes a mage a mage” and little else. This notion is a disservice to another piece of characterization that can really add to your individual mage’s persona and appearance.

First off, though, the Storyteller needs to put a handle on Avatars in the chronicle. The “default” setting for **Mage** assumes that Avatars are chunks of Primal energy, not really self-aware, that hold memories of past lives and act as an interface between consciousness and magic. But there are many different ways to toy with them depending on the game you want to play!

- **Primal Energy:** The “default” scenario for **Mage** assumes that the Avatar is not really self-aware, but it “fakes it” through memories and emotions carried through several lifetimes. Avatars thus carry past lives through reincarnation and give mages advice or guidance, but they are not infallible, and their desires often coincide with the nature of their energy (their Essence) and their historical inertia (what all their former lives did). Avatars tend to assume particular forms based on their inherent memories and emotions, or perhaps just based on their key shape. (That is, an Avatar might have one shape that it always uses, it might change its appearance over time, or it could have many forms.)

- **God-shards:** A close version to the “Primal Energy” theory is the idea of the Avatar as a shard of God, the One, Prime, whatever you call it. This theory is the one that the Celestial Chorus espouses, and it’s popular with many other mages, too. In this version, the Avatar has drives and goals of its own, because it has small pieces of Godhood in it. It wakes up and lends the mage its power to tap into the universe. Because it’s a shard of divinity, it’s intimately tied to the cosmos, but the mage must learn to use this tie. Such Avatars can get really snotty, too, up to and including punishing their host mages if the mage doesn’t do what it wants. You could have vindictive shards, helpful shards or just bored shards. For a twist, make different Avatars come from different gods. You can hook the chronicle together by making all of the players’ Avatars come from one god/Pure One, or perhaps by making them search for Avatars of a specific lineage.

- **Souls:** You could just see the Avatar as the individual’s soul. Doing so makes the Avatar and soul one and the same, naturally, which has some metaphysical implications... what, exactly, does Gilgul do? Why would your Avatar assume a particular form? Is it there to guide you to a more spiritual level, act as your conscience, or what? Naturally, Spirit magic suddenly takes on a whole new importance.

- **The Subconscious:** The Avatar could be nothing more than the unrefined visions and drives of the mage’s mind. Humans may have souls, but only a mage has an active spark of inner will that allows him to penetrate to his pure subconscious and reach into it for inspiration or power. The mage’s Essence then becomes part of his personality, while his Quintessence is held by the most dynamic, vibrant parts of his mind. This paradigm leads to neat possibilities like using Mind magic to mess with Avatars, or even eating someone’s brain to gain his enlightenment!

- **Angels and Demons:** This idea runs kind of far afield from your usual **Mage** fare, but it makes for a nice theological chronicle. The Avatar is an angelic or demonic patron, giving the mage power and guidance. Your mages might align according to their “sides” or just by similar goals — and it’s possible for angels and demons to have overlapping ends through different means, or similar methods leading to disparate goals. In this game, you can explore questions of faith, religion and a very apocalyptic tone. The final days are here, and the heralds of Heaven and Hell are your characters. You’ll have to tweak how past lives work, of course, and decide what theology (if any) is “right.”

### PLAYING WITH YOURSELF

So your Storyteller has gone to all this work to decide how Avatars work in his cosmology. Naturally, he hasn’t told you what he’s decided, but that shouldn’t stop you from defining your Avatar. Look into its appearance and motives. These descriptors can provide another nice hook for game play and characterization.

- **Communication:** How does your Avatar communicate with your mage, if at all? Does it whisper inside her head? Talk? Shout? Materialize in a form that only she can see and make rude



gestures? Provide sudden impulses or images? Show up in dreams?

- **Appearance:** What does your mage's Avatar look like? Most mages learn to recognize their Avatars, and most Avatars take on a distinctive appearance. An Avatar can be anything from a blue-skinned six-armed hermaphrodite to a simple cat. There's usually some indication of the Avatar's Essence in its choice of appearance, though. Dynamic Avatars might appear as balls of pulsing light or fractal patterns, Pattern Avatars could manifest as machines, numbers or concepts or just in some mundane form, Primordial Avatars

might show up as people from the mage's past, and Questing Avatars could appear as animal guides or spirits.

- **Motives:** Even if the Avatar isn't self-aware or is just a part of the mage's mind, it may well have goals and drives. The Avatar could push the mage to anything from regimentation of her schedule to the desire for some really good noodles. Some desires may come from past lives; others may tie to the Avatar's origin. A good trick is to pick a couple of strange drives and let the Storyteller decide upon their basis, depending on how Avatars work for the chronicle.

K. —

*This next section — which could very well be considered 'an introduction to the Important Stuff' — comes from a tape recording of an explanation to some acolytes, as far as I can tell. I've taken the liberty of removing the various sighs, coughs and the like.*

— X.

## THE PARADIGM



What is the paradigm? The paradigm is how you conceive of magic, and how you channel it to do what you do. Every mage is different, as is evidenced by the foci that each mage chooses, and how he chooses to use them. What is good for the goose, in the case of magic, is not always good for the gander.

Of paradigm, there has been, since about the 1400's or so, a shared idea in each Tradition. It is the idea that magic can be channeled through nine avenues, to affect the world around us. These avenues we call Spheres, and they are the basic language that every Tradition mage and some Orphans use to communicate what we do to each other. "I am a Forces mage," means that I channel most of my energies into affecting Patterns of energy. "I am a Life mage," means that I channel most of my energies into affecting Patterns of life. Forces and Life magic are quintessentially the same. One can not feel magic and know instantly what kind it is without feeling out for what that magic is affecting. The difference comes in how that magic is channeled and what it is going to affect. The idea of Spheres comes from the idea that these are the nine key divisions of existence in this world, although some few argue that there is a tenth as well.

Is it possible for one to do magic without the Spheres? Perhaps. Certainly, before the Traditions gathered, the Spheres as a metaphysical construct did not exist. However, they are the most widely disseminated system of magical theory among Tradition teachings today. Each Tradition adopts a means of looking at each Sphere. In return, the mage can describe his magic in broad terms so that other mages can recognize its roots: "I am performing magic that affects the Forces." The mage may not understand how his compatriot does so, but he recognizes the validity of its effect on the chosen Sphere.

Foci act as a mage's guide in directing through a Sphere. We continue to use them until we can visualize for ourselves that road, though the foci will always make it simpler, even then. But at first, they are completely necessary. A mage can not find his Sphere without his foci. They can take any form, but they and the reasoning behind them will always relate to the Sphere being influenced.

Each mage looks at each Sphere differently. This is all dependent on the teaching and individual beliefs of the mage. What is most aggravating to many at first is that there is no single true way to look at magic, except to say that there is no one single way to look at magic. The idea that magic

comes from the realm of the spirits is just as viable as the idea that magic comes from the balance of the mind, or the union of man and God, or man and Avatar. I know that probably floats above your head, but it won't be long until you begin to see it.

It begins by realizing, probably by accident one day, that you do not necessarily need to use a particular focus for a particular spell. You will still find it makes the spell easier, but one day it will not be necessary. This is the beginning to a broader understanding of magic.

Such enlightenment is not easy. We will learn eventually to cast off or compromise some of the ideas of our paradigms as we adapt, learn, change and grow. Necessity often dictates that. The road to true enlightenment dictates a willingness to cast off static ideas. For most mages, though, there are ideas that they will never cast aside. There are Archmages who could obtain the enlightenment of an Oracle, but they refuse to let go of their concepts of magic. Perhaps they are afraid that they will lose power if they do so. There are Traditionalists who cannot understand other ways to do magic. And, of course, there is the problem of relearning magic... when one has spent 20 years honing a particular technique, it is not readily abandoned for something totally different and new.

Power is the most common reason why foci and paradigm are not abandoned. Even when mages find that the foci and paradigm are not needed, they will still find magic easier to channel through them. Other times, mages simply cannot get past the static ideas of their foci and paradigm. I've noticed that Virtual Adepts have the hardest time doing so. Sons of Ether come close to that difficulty, since so much of their magic is rooted in science. They believe in the power of the object over the power of the person. Although objects do have power, popular science denies that mankind can surpass his limits without the aid of tools. That paradigm is thus self-limiting.

The Hollow Ones are a strange exception. They do not concentrate on any one Sphere, or in any one way to use foci. They do, for the most part communicate in Spheres. Hollow Ones can usually speak intelligibly with Traditionalists about what they're doing. That's good. It means the rest of us can understand them somewhat. As for their study of Spheres and foci, though, it is a mish-mash, varying from cabal to cabal. Although they readily accept new means into their methodology, they lose the

dedication of focus that allows Traditionalists to rely on ancient foundations. The Traditions have refined their magic for a long, long time, because it works well and teaches well. The Hollow Ones just accept whatever they can get their hands on, which means that each one must learn his own direction.

Orphans, like Hollow Ones, tend to also have mish-mash paradigms. Roughly self-taught, these mages generally shape their paradigm around what they've always perceived magic to be. Those who are taken into a Tradition generally find homes in those that match their particular style. One might think that, like the Hollow Ones, they would have the easiest time diversifying their styles. That is not so, as, like the Hollow Ones, their paradigm tends to be influenced by the world around them. Also, of all mages, Orphans are the ones most likely to seek out and obtain the "normal life," something that is generally — but not always — counterproductive to expanding one's magical paradigm.

Technocratic mages have their own ideas of paradigm. Theirs is more grounded in science, and therefore their magic tends to relate to science as well. For them, scientific achievements make their magic possible and real. From my experience, their paradigms also tend to click much easier than the Traditions and other mages, making it easier for them to work together.

Nobody can make a real definitive guess at a unified Marauder paradigm. Since we assume that the Marauder is caught in a permanent walking Quiet, we can guess that it is dependent on the nature of the Quiet. But what that is, no one can say. Perhaps you could enter their minds to find out, but I would not suggest that. The experience kills some, Marauds a few, and drives most into irreparable Quiet.

Paradigm is very important to consider in both working with and against other mages. How do your allies view their magic? If you want to ever work magic with them successfully, you must know. A Verbena will not be able to combine spells with a Son of Ether without the two of them determining where they can get their magic to mesh. That's another important use of the Spheres. The Verbena and the Son of Ether can determine what Spheres need to be influenced and what they have that can actually be pooled together. By the same token, if you're fighting an adversary, having an idea of their paradigm can help you in fighting them. If you can make your enemies guess wrong on yours, then you can make them underestimate you, or find you unpredictable.



## WE'RE SHOVING PARADIGMS AND FOCI DOWN YOUR THROAT!

**Mage** obviously relies heavily on paradigms and foci in its core incarnation. The rulebook spends all this time on paradigms and foci, so they're totally important, and you have to use them or you're not playing **Mage**.

Ahem. Bullshit.

Like any other story consideration, paradigms and foci are themselves just tools for telling your story. You need only use them in a chronicle inasmuch as you like using them for a fun game.

Again, the level of distinction about paradigms and foci is up to the chronicle that the Storyteller wants to run. Ergo, you can't just decide that your mage doesn't use foci when everyone else must. Ultimately, that's a Storyteller call... but as a player, there's plenty of room to wiggle with your paradigm. Consider:

- **Rigidly Paradigmatic:** Your mage believes that his paradigm is the "one true way." Others may do magic, but they're not doing it *right*. Your character probably leavens his discussion liberally with specialized magical jargon from his Tradition. Characters of this sort might get a difficulty bonus of one when using rites made by their Tradition, but an equal difficulty penalty when combining magic with anyone of a different Tradition, and they'd never use a rite from a different Tradition (although they might "translate" one).

- **Closed Paradigm:** Your character believes that he's tumbled to a system of magic that fits a personal vision of truth. Usually, he lets other people get on with their own magical practices, but he may see some practices as wrong or misguided (from which can stem much personality conflict). He believes that his Tradition teaches a good set of values and

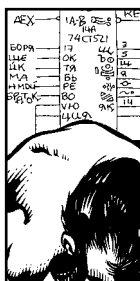
magic, and he thinks that those values are good to indoctrinate other newly Awakened people who are ready. He sees the value of other paradigms but he doesn't really understand how they work, and he tries to get other mages to see his point of view. Most mages adhere thus to their paradigm.

- **Open Paradigm:** Your character believes that his paradigm is one truth, but that others are equally valid. He doesn't necessarily study others, but he allows that other people may perceive truths very different from his. He is flexible about combining his magic with other styles. He does not usually incorporate other paradigms because his paradigm works well for him, but he has no problem with guiding a student to a mentor who might have a "better fitting" paradigm for that individual. He shares knowledge with other mages and tries occasionally to see where they're coming from. Many Tradition visionaries fit into this category.

- **Liberal Paradigm:** Your character feels that there is no one truth, but that all truths are equally valid (or invalid). As a result, he uses a particular paradigm because it's what he learned, but he's more than happy to learn others if he can spare the time. He shares his methods and incorporates other techniques. He tries to devise new ways of looking at and performing magic. A mage of this sort might be able to learn other Traditions' ways of doing magic (and thus use their foci), but he would have difficulty improving due to his lack of depth in magical study.

Note that all of these possibilities assume that your Storyteller enforces paradigms at all! Your Storyteller could very well run a chronicle with no Traditions, mix-and-match paradigms, paradigms but no foci... the combinations are up to you.

## CONSENSUAL REALITY AND THE PHYSICS MAJOR



There's a story that circulates — trust me, it circulates — about a physics major who had some radical ideas. This student, whom we shall call Emma, was brilliant, but she was also a little... off.

Emma developed this new avenue of thought, an avenue that she called "consensual reality." The idea behind it was simple. You could affect anything before you as long as you knew the proper avenues to travel

to get there. Emma's theory, too exhaustive to include, was based on concepts from such well-studied sources as Newton, Einstein and Hawking. The theory is incredible, and it allows for nearly anything to happen as long as there is a road to get there. Lead to gold, a cure for cancer, a trip to the moon.

Emma, my friends, is the Technocracy, and Emma is why they have won and we have lost. Emma is why for every one Technocracy mage who encounters Paradox, there are four Tradition mages or Orphans afflicted.

K —

*Interesting theory, but it begs the question of whether the rules were objective or subjective. Did the Technocracy simply 'discover' the rules of the universe, or did the rules come to be because the Technocracy made people believe them?*

*One of the card-before-house problems we face is Unbelief with regard to some of the types of pseudo-Byzones mentioned later. Clearly, if reality is formed by some consensus of what people believe and accept, then there shouldn't be vampires — as a whole, people don't believe in vampires any more; there are just as many vampire-believers as there are, say, angel-believers, but you don't see angels running around in malls. (Well, you probably don't see vampires doing that, either, but they are out there.) If reality's not formed by consensus, then why does our magic falter while the Technocracy's science proceeds? Is there some objective standard of what's 'fantastic' and what's not?*

*For that matter, there are certain constants that seem objective. We all use Quintessence to power magic, for instance. Yet I have it on reasonably good authority that there are mages in Asia — outside the Atactic Brotherhood — who can perform similar effects without Quintessence at all. Did we form our own beliefs on this matter?*

*Difficult questions. At our level, there are no apparent answers, yet.*

*I personally think that reality is defined in part by consensus but also in part by some constants that we don't see. Humanity has chosen to embrace technology and reject magic, so the world is predominantly technological. Still, there are elements of magic that have been passed on for centuries; these are still with us. Even the weight of an entire world's disbelief cannot erase them completely overnight. Our magic continues to erode, but it may survive as long as there are some believers. Dragons and unicorns are long gone from this world, but their images will remain as long as a few people believe.*

*Of course, I could be wrong.*

— X.

You see, Emma played by the rules. Emma found logical avenues to achieve the fantastic results that she wanted. Even when they failed, they simply fizzled, for the most part. Few of them blew up. Emma plays by the rules, and reality likes Emma.

The rest of us exist against the rules.

Ever wondered why people feel sometimes uneasy around you, why it's hard to keep up a true intimate relationship with a Sleeper, why people instantly know there is something different about you? It's because mages

resonate. Our very presence puts ripples in the Tapestry that we call reality. Emma suffers it too, don't worry. But Emma can displace it a lot easier, while still doing her thing. Why? Because reality has absorbed Emma's thing.

Where do you think the ideas for the telephone, phonograph, camera, television and radio came from? What about those trips to the moon? You think reality let that happen on her own? No. Reality got prompted, and Emma knew how to prompt her so that it would happen with the least amount of fuss.

That's what magic is all about, right, shaping reality, getting it to do what we want in a given set of circumstances? Here's the thing: You don't mess with something like reality without some consequences. If you're gradual enough, you can sometimes get away without any occurrences. Reality will accept your logic. Unfortunately, we don't usually have the luxury of being so gradual. Even our coincidental effects eventually get reality's attention.

That attention can come in many forms. There is, of course, the Resonance of our being, that strangeness that surrounds us, some more so than others. Other than annoyance, Resonance is not too much of a problem, so long as you don't allow yourself to resonate too strongly for prolonged periods of time.

There are occurrences that come from Paradox at times. They are similar to Resonance, but unlike Resonance, they have physical manifestations. These occurrences happen when mages play badly with their toys. Simple things happen; milk curdles around them or plants wilt. At other times, clocks run backwards, or things just won't work right. More advanced forms begin to affect the mage personally, affecting perceptions, or warping the mage's body. These flaws can range from annoying to dangerous.

Then there is Backlash. I almost prefer Backlash at times. It's quick and simple. It's nasty, but then I don't have to suffer for days or weeks with my mistakes. Backlash is, simply put, your magical energies coming back on you along the primary channel of magic used. It can range from headaches to lightning strikes, and Backlash can kill you and those around you.

Paradox Realms are another result of bending reality too far. They aren't fun things. Mages don't know they're in one, at first. They just go along their merry way, when suddenly they realize that something is very wrong. The wrongness depends on what the mage did to get drawn into the Realm. The solution can be simple, or complex, depending on what was done. It never requires the use of magic.





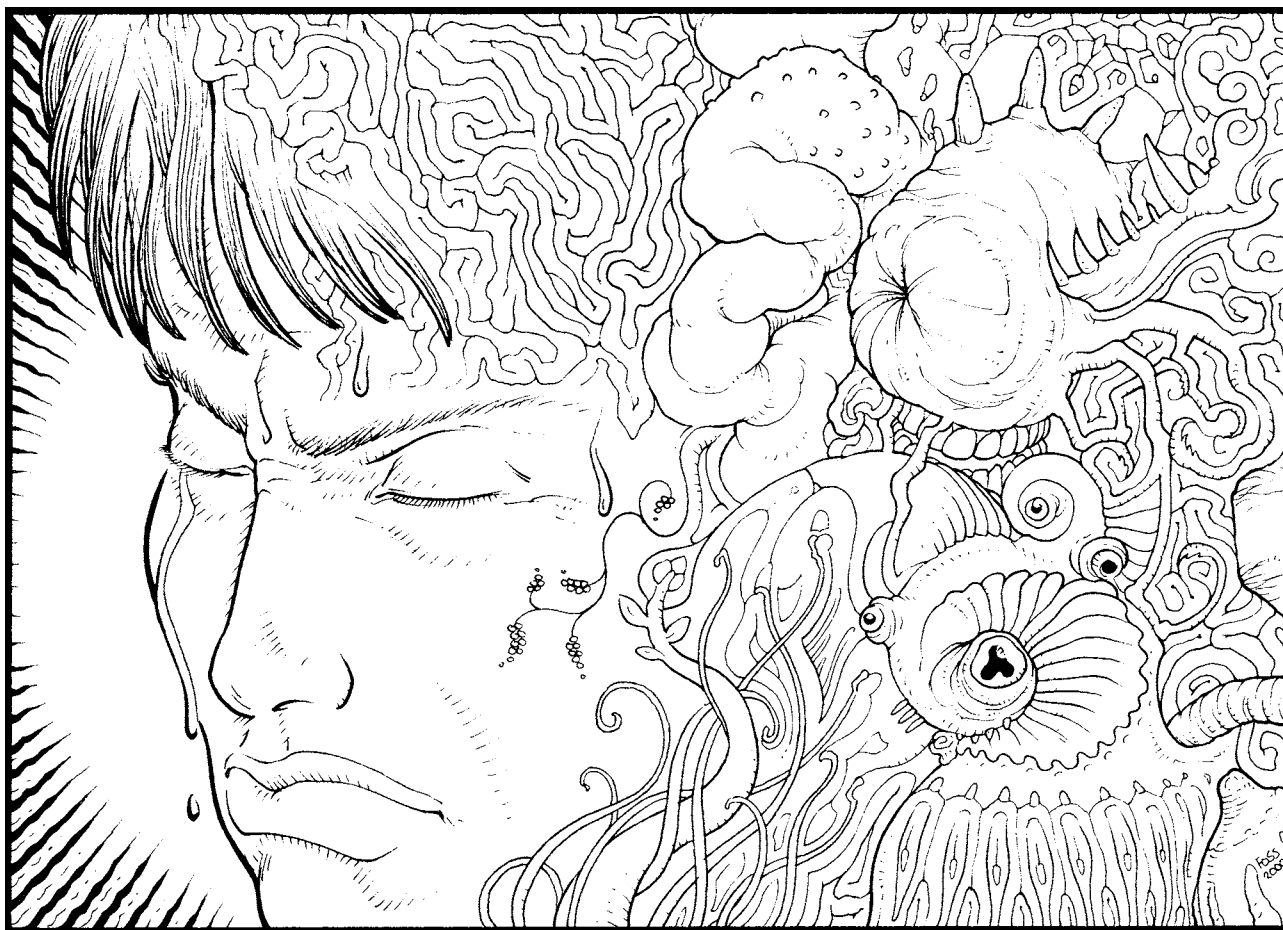
Then there are the Paradox Spirits. These guys can be nasty. We've all heard the legends of Wrinkle, who can make it so particularly flashy mages never existed. That's all fine and good if you're mondo powerful, but you'll probably not have to worry about his caliber of spirit for a while. That doesn't mean that you don't have some dangerous ones to watch out for, though. The smallest ones are annoying, but they can be dangerous after a time if not dealt with. Others can be quite destructive, although they may seem small and simple. Think of the damage that the "Welduh" can do after a while of erasing your memory. Dealing with them is like dealing with any spirit, but it's likely to be non-magical solutions that appease them.

There's also the balancing factor of Unbelief. The theory behind Unbelief is that those things too fantastical to be accepted will slowly pass on. Fantastic mechanical creations stop working. Incredible creatures die. There's a theory that one day we too will fall to Unbelief. With the latest occurrences, some feel that it already has begun. Unfortunately, once Unbelief sets in, there is nothing you can do to stop it, short of a

miracle scientific discovery. The only thing you can do is prepare to counteract it before it can begin, and there are some things that people will simply never believe.

Then there is Quiet. Quiet is a dangerous madness that can often be the end of a mage's road. They aren't just caused by Paradox. A mage who is increasingly unable to cope will sometimes find himself locked into one. Failed mind magic can also lead into a Quiet, sometimes a nasty one. Quiet stems from a total unbalance of magic. When magic gets completely out of control, it whip-snaps back and changes your mind. You know how your perceptions influence reality? Quiet springs back and influences your perceptions.

Most Quiets begin with simple delusions that will affect only the mage's senses. It's a very horrible madness, as no one else can see what the mage sees. In many ways, he is trapped in his own mind, living a paradigm that reality has twisted just as the mage attempted to warp reality. The amount of time Quiet lasts depends on what brought it on. Some factors lead the mage straight into the mindscape of the Quiet from which few return.



Hobgoblins are another fun and vulgar snap of reality's don't-fuck-with-me whip. These beasts are illusions that affect the mage; illusions that can sometimes manifest themselves to others. The hobgoblins usually come from a Quiet, when the delusions of the magical madness begin manifesting themselves into Quintessential creatures. The hobgoblins are usually secrets of the mage, things she would rather not let others know about. Unless you destroy it, it will stay around. How long it stays depends on the power of the mage responsible for it. They can range from inanimate objects that appear to people walking and talking to the mage, or sometimes others.

Hobgoblins and the delusions they spawn from are a more common form of Quiet for Disciples. Hobgoblins can be fought or allowed to fade away, but having

one does not mean others may not appear. They can also cause many problems, often doing things to affect the world around them. Many Sons of Ether have been plagued by little Gremlins that were the result of manifested hobgoblins. Once they manifest, they can be fought, but they will have the originator's abilities, making them difficult to deal with.

Mages affected by Quiet or hobgoblins can enter mindscapes of their own will. This journey can be dangerous, as failure can keep the mage there forever. Others who attempt to enter a mindscape — be it self-induced or not — may find themselves trapped in their own Quiets. Such Quiets are not kind, but they are fortunately rare for Disciples. It usually takes a very large disturbance to merit such a punishment.



## WHAT YOU KNOW AND WHAT YOU DON'T

We're talking pretty freely about "consensual reality" and "paradigms" and stuff here, but don't assume that mages know all of this information. If mages already knew all the secrets of the universe, they wouldn't have anywhere to go!

As with any chronicle direction, it's up to the Storyteller to decide how much a mage knows about the "nature of reality" and its cosmological underpinnings. Here, in black and white, are the assumptions about a core **Mage** game and what mages would probably know:

- **Consensual Reality:** Most mages accept that reality is shaped by will, and that even the weaker wills of Sleepers have a profound effect through their massive numbers. Mages believe that the rules of the world function only because Sleepers believe in them. However, there are a number of puzzling exceptions. For instance, most mages just don't have explanations for things like vampires or Paradox-free sorcery.

Technocrats *don't* accept the mutability of reality, in general; most Technocrats believe that they work according to objective principles. They want to stamp out mages because mages are *dangerous*, not because they go against the consensus. (What the Inner Circle believes is another matter entirely.)

- **Historical Inertia:** This concept is not well understood by most mages. The average mage just thinks that there are some things that are apparently constant.

Maybe such constants would change if the consensus changed radically enough, but who knows? The Technocracy predicates science on repeatability, so if there is gravity and there is a formula to account for it, then that formula can be worked to account for its existence historically, too. In this fashion the Technocracy "proves" that certain things have always been true.

- **Paradox:** Mages can't agree on the source of Paradox. Some mages believe that it comes from self-doubt, others from violating the consensus, still others that it's just magic that goes a little out of control. Mages recognize that magic that fits "the rules" draws less difficulty, but still argue as to why this is true.

- **Paradigms and Foci:** Most mages believe that a paradigm and associated foci are not just trappings, but real necessities to doing magic. Although the will is important, it can only be directed by using the right tools to show what needs to be done. Mages accomplish this direction through their foci, and their paradigms show why they believe that certain things work. Most mages accept that traditional practices have power, and so there are many ways to do magic, but most Disciples and lesser mages scoff at the idea of doing freeform magic without paradigms and foci. Mages who start to overcome their need for foci begin to transcend this understanding, but it's a difficult process and not one that happens all at once.

## SENDINGS



Something new has occurred in the cosmology of the magical universe, something that has many alarmed and confused. New beings have arisen. They are spirits of some kind that are seeking out trained mages, although no one is sure why and for whom. These spirits, called Sendings for the questlike nature of their appearance, seem to resemble Avatars or hobgoblins.

The Sendings are a mixed blessing. In some cases, they come with vital information, or they direct a young

Disciple into the direction of a new benefactor. At other times, they misdirect the mage, or lead him into traps. The biggest problem with them is that there is no way to tell the good from the bad. Mages who follow a Sending's urgings may find themselves quickly in over their heads. Mages who don't may find themselves either facing a situation they might have been saved from or facing an angry spirit.

The only thing consistent to them is their inconsistency. Even the mages who do listen to them do so warily.

K. —

*My research into Sendings tells me that they stem from some sort of magical imperative or construct. I can't be too much more certain than that. I've met a few malicious ones myself. I've noticed that they all seem to have a strong spiritual presence, almost as if something has granted Prime energy on to them and then given them a direction. I have a theory but I'd need to go to the Umbra to test it — and I don't have to tell you how tough that would be.*

— X.

# THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD



We are not alone. Of that, you can be certain. There are many other things out there, things that hate us, things that would kill us. Not that I blame them. Some of us hunt them. There are rivalries that go on so long, we don't even know where they started. I can tell you some of the reasons they persist, though.

## VAMPIRES

These creatures of the night do exist. I've encountered one or two, and while there was no violence, no one was comfortable on any side. For one, they positively stand out from the crowd if you're sensitive to Life magic or to Entropy. To Life, they register as totally deprived — except for the power inherent in their stolen blood. To Entropy, well, they are like a beacon going off saying, "Here I am! I'm out of balance!" Oddly enough, there are not as many Euthanatos vampire-hunters as you might think. To many, the vampires exist outside the balance, and some Euthanatoi even view the undead as abominations to be hunted and destroyed.

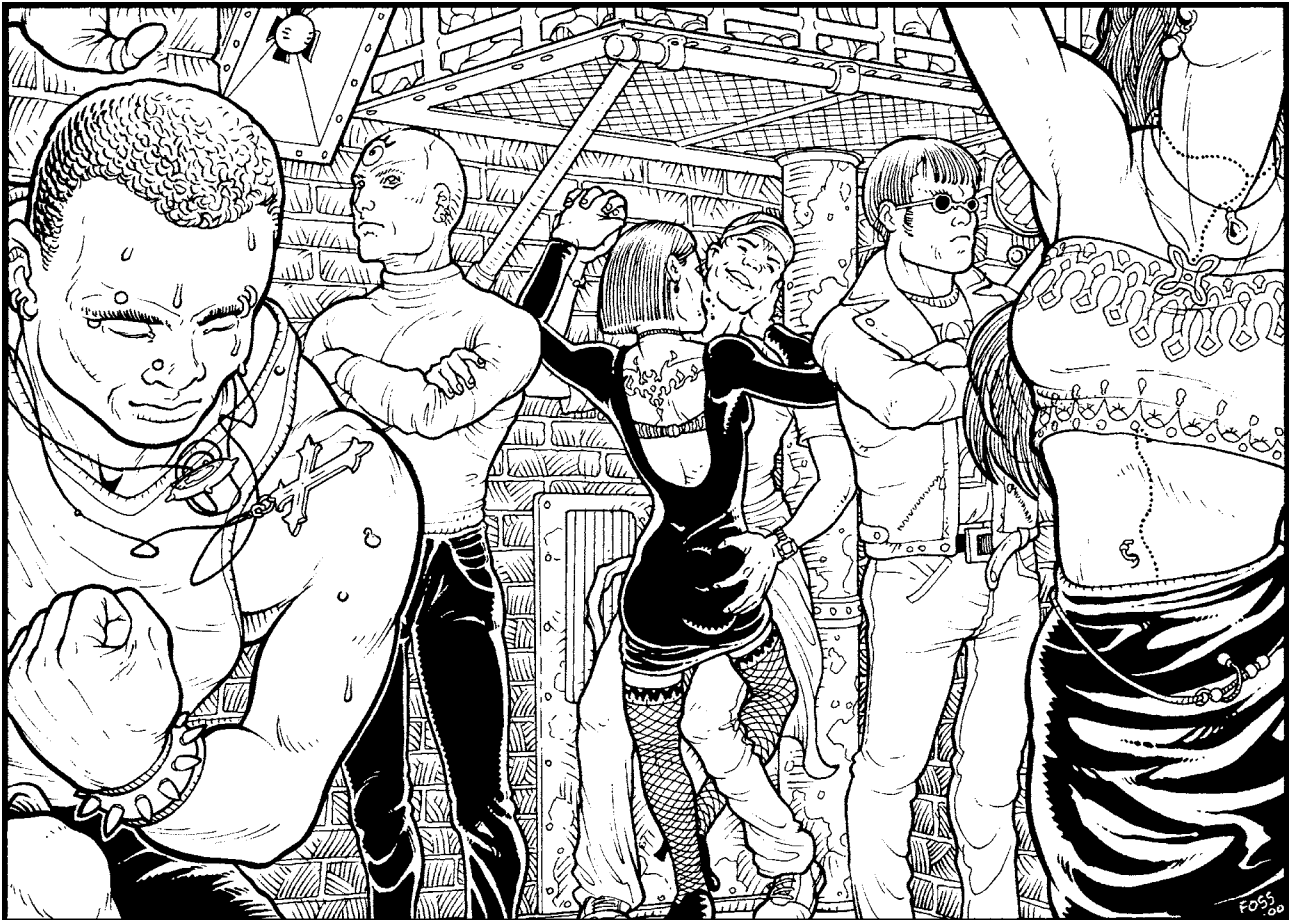
It's my experience that most mages either hate the vampires and destroy those they find, or they are curious

of them when they run across them. The rest leave well enough alone. I will admit, I am curious about them. I want to know how they manage to still exist, and why they have not gone the way of all the other myths. I would also love to sit an evening and talk history with one. Can you imagine talking to some one about the Civil War who was actually there? Or the Roman Empire?

For their part, unfortunately, they do positively hate us. Most of them do what they can to avoid us. I don't blame them. Some of them try to use us or destroy us. These are usually either very powerful or very naïve, and you unfortunately can't always tell the difference at first.

For those of us who insist on dealing with vampires, there are a few caveats. The undead are notoriously dangerous and driven. They will appear to compromise for the sake of negotiation but they will run long-term plans that may see no fruition until you're long dead. They consider everyone a potential pawn or threat — so you're one or the other.

Rarely, some vampire will try to latch on to a mage and draw him into the world of the undead. Such matters usually end badly. Vampires only really want two things: survival and blood. Any mage who gets in the way is ex-







pendable; a mage is useful for his powers, as a tool against the vampire's adversaries. Don't presume friendship or trust. And above all, don't get bitten: becoming one of the undead permanently impairs the ability to work magic. Just ask the Order of Hermes.

A careful Disciple doesn't have to worry much about running afoul of vampires. Mostly, they stick to the heavy cities, and of course they are active only at night. They don't venture into the spirit worlds. They also don't have much in the way of useful occult knowledge, excepting a few small cults within their ranks — a mage can easily steer clear of them.

On the other hand, you'd best watch out if you get involved in certain messes. First off, just by *being* a mage, you draw strangeness to yourself. You could find yourself in the middle of a war of the undead through no fault of your own. Since vampires come from human stock, they

can be just as diverse in their interests as humans, but there are a few things to watch out for. Vampires always need a ready blood supply, so they tend to congregate in places where a few pints won't be noticed: among the homeless, insane, lower classes and hospitals. Since they can pick and choose who they inculcate, they also have a tendency to pick sociable or cunning mortals (with a few exceptions) to join the ranks.

So, the final verdict is that unless you're sure of what you're getting into, you should leave well enough alone.

If you get into a fight, move. They can replace their ranks and they can afford to wait.

## THE WEREWOLVES

Then there are the werewolves. All the warnings I gave about the vampires go triple for the werewolves. Where the vampires will either avoid us or use us, the werewolves will

K. —

*Sound, if terse, advice. I've never crossed paths with the undead and I hope that I never do. They seem to have a tendency to meddle — those that aren't total monsters, that is. Aside from the fact that their magic is inherent to their nature and thus more certain and less dangerous to them than our own magic is to us, they are motivated much less by any of the nice, caring human drives of mortal days. Stay out of their way.*

*Of course, the Order of Hermes apparently didn't take that advice to heart. This could bode ill.*

— X.

almost always kill us on sight. There are a few who manage to get along with them, but I stress few. Dreamspeakers can usually manage it. Verbena can too. Rarely.

The main problem that we have with the werewolves is one of resources. It's funny. The places where we find the strongest stores of Quintessence are also heavily guarded by the werewolves. They don't take well to intruders in their lands, either. They will certainly kill anyone they catch leaching power. Fortunately, if you know what to look for, you can avoid these places. Of course, the problem lies in knowing what to look for.

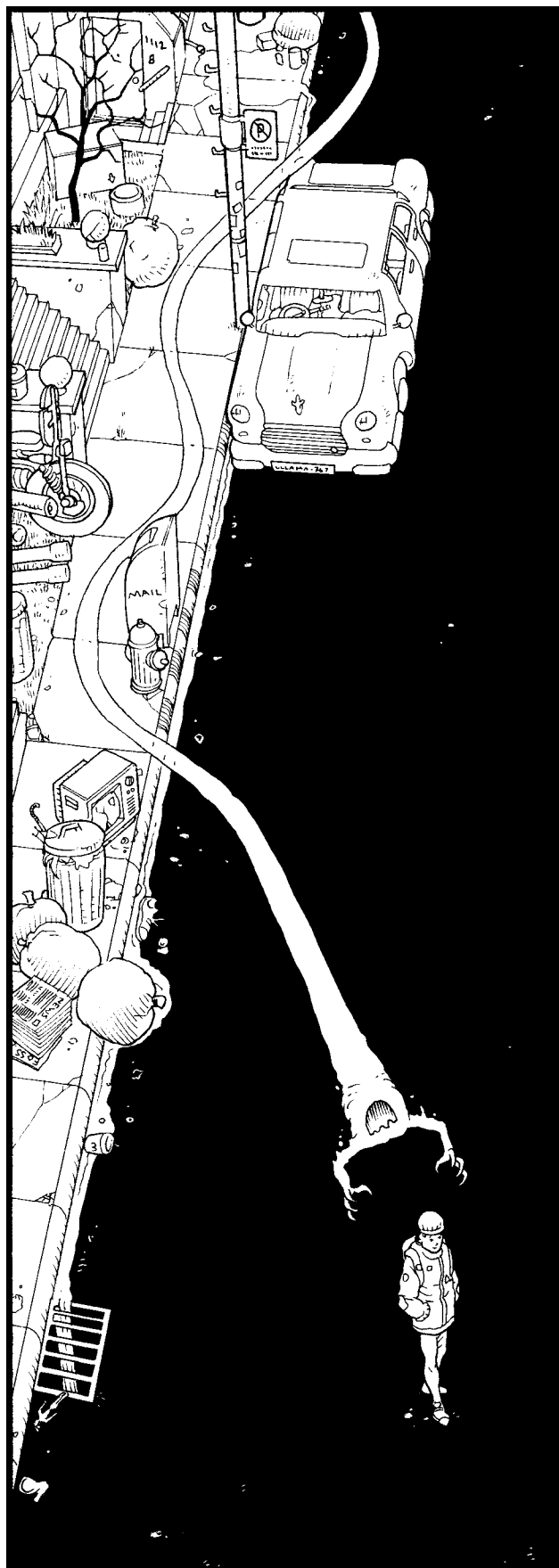
My advice, if you find a *really* strong pool of Quintessence, is to avoid it. It probably belongs to someone. If you really must have it, I would approach it, constantly calling out to whoever might lurk there, asking to come in. If it's guarded, they'll approach you. If you're lucky, they won't kill you on sight. Whatever you do, though, do not take it without permission.

I've been told by Dreamspeakers that the werewolves deal a lot with the spirits. If you have to traffic on the spirit side, you'll probably run across them. Do what you can to avoid conflict. If you can manage an ally out of it, even better, but I wouldn't count on it. Watch out — they don't suffer from the effects of the Avatar Storm, though nobody knows why.

I would also learn from the lesson of a Euthanatos whom I'll call Alfred. Allie, well, Allie was smart, I'll give him that, and he always meant well. One day, as we're approaching what we hope will be a Quintessential swimming pool, we're met by one of the wolf-boys. He's actually willing to talk to us, which surprised me, let me tell you. Was, that is, until Allie did a little perception spell and made an observation. In seeking to relate to the werewolf, Allie made the comment that the werewolves really served the same purpose as he did (Allie was using himself to refer to the Euthanatos). I should point out that the werewolf was already dubious about Allie, and I think I was the only reason Allie had not already been attacked. As it was, the beast gutted Allie before he could even think to react. As for me...? I took the moment to step out of it, as it were. I had quite the headache later, but I lived to tell about it.

## THE WRAITHS

Wraiths, also called the Restless Dead, are curious ones. Most mages completely ignore them. They do, on occasion, attract some attention, especially when they manage to affect the living world. I've heard many Euthanatoi comment about them, that they keep themselves locked in the cycle. I've also seen many Euthanatoi wonder at the resistance the wraiths put up when said Euthanatoi try to help them pass on completely. The Euthies don't always get that not everyone





wants to move on. I call it a Traditional failing. I would also note that if a Euthanatos is not careful, he can easily find himself haunted by them.

Of the wraiths, my advice is leave them be. Unless they are doing some harm, let them do as they will. My understanding is that they have their own little place to exist, and that their affecting our side is rare at best. A lot of times, they are only trying to help anyway. So, if they want to help, help them help. It's the best way to ensure you don't get Euthanatos Syndrome (i.e., haunted).

## THE FAE

I personally like the fae-folk. I have associates who don't care for them. I like them because of what they seek to be, and what they seek to do. Our goals are really very similar. They want wonder to return to the world,

we want to Awaken the world. In the end, the things we both want most are to survive.

Still, I can see why most would avoid them. Usually, we can manage to be unaffected by them. Usually. Some of us have more problems with that than others. Cult of Ecstasy mages, for instance, are completely at a loss for how to avoid their magic. The more technological minded, though, don't usually have that problem. However, if you let them catch you off guard and enchant you, you are almost completely at their whim. When enchantment occurs, they can even cast spells to keep you from using yours.

If you can get their respect, though, than you have powerful allies. As I said, we both work for the same things. The main thing is getting both sides to see that. Just be careful. In some ways, dealing with the fae is like dealing with Marauders. Some of them are just as chaotic.

## SUPERNATURAL CRITTERS AND YOU

"My mage used to be a vampire, see, but he was made mortal again with a spell, and he's also related to werewolves, and they have this pact with faeries. Cool, huh?"

Mages have enough to do without having to rely on *other* supernatural shticks to carry them through the day. The in-character advice in this book is just as pertinent out-of-game: You can run a perfectly good **Mage** game without messily killing it and your characters off with other critters.

You've read, doubtless dozens of times, the caveats about keeping various game themes separate and so on, so we won't beat that into the ground again.

Of course, you didn't spend your hard-earned cash for us to waste space without giving ideas on how to make something work, so...

### DISCIPLES AND VAMPIRES

**Mage-Vampire** crossovers are probably the most ubiquitous of all the **Mage** multi-genre games. But that's probably because you can do *so many* neat things.

A mage in the courts of vampires is a valuable and precious resource, and that value puts her in danger. Other vampires will seek to manipulate the mage or destroy her to neutralize her advantage. Everyone will assume that the mage works for someone else, and if the mage tries to be up-front and say that she's a neutral party who's just stopping by, she'll probably be taken aside by a nasty, brutish fellow who may or may not take three seconds to explain the Masquerade before gunching the mage.

So how do you work your mojo to keep a mage from dying in a vampire court? You make the mage

too valuable a commodity to destroy. First off, it helps if the mage cuts a deal with someone large and in charge — like the prince, if you decide to run with all the titles and things from **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Furthermore, the mage better have a bargaining chip to make sure that the protection deal is upheld. A good dodge is that most vampires won't know what the mage really can and can't do, so the mage can get his hands on just about anything (a name, a bit of blood, whatever) and claim that he can work "sympathetic magic" that will blow the hell out of whoever touches him. If you want to be totally up-and-up and honest, what are you doing among *vampires*?

Conversely, a lone vampire wandering around with mages tends to skew the chronicle a bit — you have to do things at night and you worry about the famous vampire-to-lawn-ornament spell. Your best bet is to set up a situation where the mages need the vampire. Perhaps he knows people that they don't or has information that they don't. Callous mages may just mind-rip a vampire for such information, so it helps if the vampire is known and trusted by someone (say, other vampires) and must act as an intermediary. A vampire can also be a useful companion when you can't risk vulgar magic but you have to rely on "powerz."

So, without further ado, some hooks for your character vis-à-vis the undead:

- Your mage seeks to undo the Curse of Caine (good luck!) and wants to find a way to make a vampire mortal again. This is a subject for a whole chronicle and then some....

- A friend of your mage was blood bound, and you have to find a way to break the spell — or destroy the dominating vampire.

- Your character want revenge for getting attacked by a vampire, or for a friend's death at one's hands.

- A relative or friend of your mage was turned into a vampire, and although relations are shaky at best, you both have a sort of "in" to one another's groups.

- Vampires and mages might fight over the same magical artifacts — say, Hermetic mages clashing with Tremere over spellbooks.

- Your character used to be a servant to the vampires, but some shocking experience triggered the Awakening.

## WEREWOLVES AND MAGES

Most people tend to assume that werewolves and mages are pretty buddy-buddy. I mean, there's that nonsense about raiding caerns, but mages don't really do that, do they? And besides, you can just walk up and tell a werewolf "Oh, sure, that's all bunk, we're really nice guys" and he'll believe you, right? You get the idea. Even Dreamspeakers and werewolves have only shaky relations.

For their part, the shifters tend to view mages suspiciously both for their powers and for their rumors. The rumors of caern-raiding aside, the powers of Awakened magic carry phenomenal results but equally phenomenal

consequences from Paradox. As far as the shifters can see, mages are doing things that they shouldn't, and Gaia is slapping them down for it.

Of course, once mages and werewolves get off on a good foot, they can have some suspicious but mutually beneficial relations — but neither party is likely to go in for long-term deals. Who knows what a mage will do next? Werewolves don't need those mages dabbling where they don't belong. And werewolves are notoriously cranky.... No mage would want to spend too much time within claw's reach of these hair-trigger engines of death.

If you want to have your mage bum around with some shifters, try these excuses:

- A werewolf sent a spirit on some errand, and it ran into your mage and asked for help.

- Your mage inadvertently stepped on some subsidiary of Pentex while fighting the Technocracy. (Yeah... that happens *all* the time.)

- A Seeking awakened some past life in which your mage was related to the shifters.

- Some Paradox manifestation drew the attention of werewolves from the spirit world, who dropped in to see what all the funniness was about.

- Your mage's Talisman is really a fetish that was made by a werewolf a while back, and he wants it back.

## AN ADVERSARIAL ENVIRONMENT

*This is a note that Lawrence discovered soon after dear Sylvia was killed. Many had wondered, when she was found and killed, why Gilgul had not been performed. This note is evidence of why. I do believe that it was written just before her final corruption. It gives graphic detail of what happens to pull one in. It's a hair warning.*

— X.

My Dear Lawrence,

When you read this, it will be too late for me. I will be that which I have sought knowledge of for the past two years. What is written here is the last of what is good in me. I leave it with you, so that it will be the one things that my masters will not defile.

Tell me, Lawrence, have you ever looked at the face of evil to see what is reflected? It is not pleasant. For two years, I sought that face, to find out answers. I wanted to know what could be so evil that we would destroy a mage's very essence to ensure he did not return on the Cycle. What could warrant that punishment?

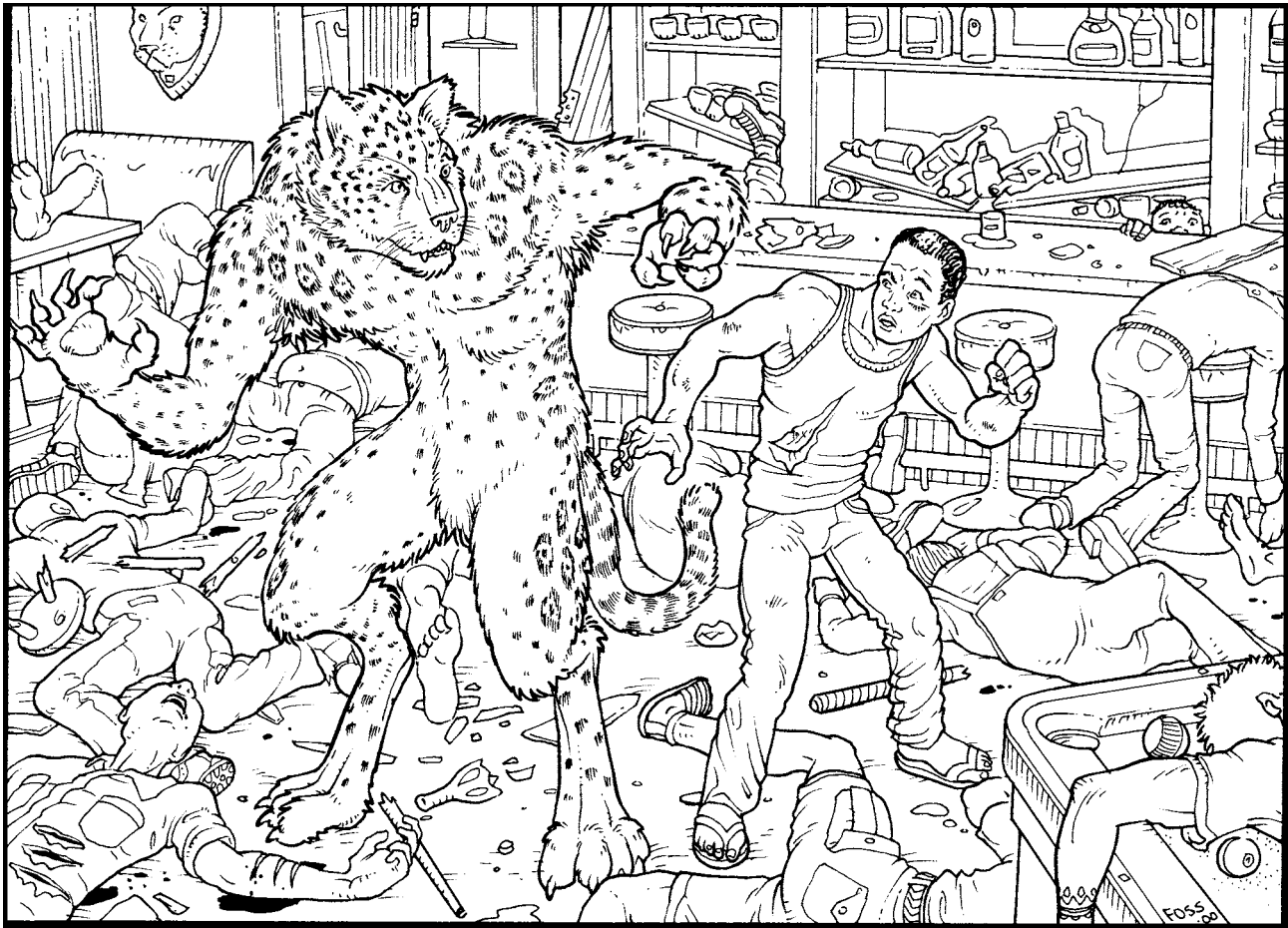
I will admit, the Gilgul of that poor mage affected me drastically. I can still hear his Avatar screaming. I wake up at night in a cold sweat sometimes.

I began looking, interviewing sources. I found that the Barabbi would talk to me, if they thought they were getting through to me. I made sure I had controlled circumstances that would allow me to follow their influence without becoming affected. I had gotten quite a bit of information about them, about what drives them. I even had rough ideas of where their strongholds were.

I don't know when things changed. At some point, I lost perspective. It was strange. I had my eye on the Barabbi I was working with. I knew what they were doing, and I knew what they wanted me to do.

Well, I thought I did. I was watching the ones I was working with. I wasn't watching their friends. For every Barabbi I had encountered, there were two, maybe three, maybe a dozen Nephandi working the wings. I look back now, and I can trace the lines of corruption. Innocent bystanders, momentary alliances, one night





stands. They were all parts of it. I can see that now. I can see how such innocent things sent me down a path, so that now I find myself at a threshold.

Tomorrow, I will Descend. Tomorrow, I will know ultimate power, and ultimate evil. Tomorrow, I will set loose my inhibitions and all of my pre-programmed opinions and ideas. Tomorrow, I will free myself.

Tonight, though, I will remember that which is most important to me, my friends. Lawrence, this is a warning. Please, please take it to heart. Don't let what happened to me happen to you or the others. You don't see these people coming. They can be anyone. Your enemy, your friend, even your brother. They manage to penetrate every tradition, and they have eyes and ears everywhere. There is a reason that we fight them as we do. They are evil, and I won't see any of you taken in because of me.

From this day on, I cannot be trusted. From the date of the letter on, take nothing I say as true. Don't trust me. I will lie to you. I will seduce you. I will deceive you, and I will bring you into hell with me. And when it is over, you will kiss me, and you will fuck me, and

you will love me, because I helped to make your dreams come true.

That is how they work, and it is how I will work after today.

I would give you the secrets I know, but I can't. There's nothing that I can do to change that. I discovered this three drafts of this letter ago. So I will only give you the warning.

Do not follow in my footsteps.

But why did I choose this? I was seeking knowledge. I found myself slowly directed toward the idea that the best way to know your enemy is to think like your enemy. That is a dangerous thing. As I sought to think like the *Barabbi*, I was seduced. The lure and promise of knowledge was more than I could resist. They fed to me their secrets. They told me the dark things that you only guess at.

What do they serve? Where do they reside? What tools do they use? How do they view magic? Who are their operatives? I know all of these answers. I could tell you so much, if only I had taken more care. But after a while, my vigilance slipped. After a while, I became

caught up in the pursuit. I am a questing mage, after all. And they fed me so well. How could I not follow?

So, tomorrow I shall walk into the gates of Hell, and I will come out as something else.

Please, take from this what you can. Do not let this be you. I love you, Lawrence. Tell the others I am sorry. Tell Nathan that I love him. I always have, and I always will, but right now, that love, none of it matters to what will happen tomorrow.

Do not look into the face of evil, Lawrence, for what you will see reflected is your own.

Until our next life,  
Lydia

## THE TECHNOCRACY



I hate writing. You know that I hate writing. I would let Ryan do this, but then no one would understand it. But I hate writing.

You want to know about the Technocracy? Where should I begin?

All right, they corner the market on reality. I don't have to tell you that. It's kind of obvious. They didn't always have that advantage, though. Once upon a time, they had it like we do. Then came the Renaissance and the Age of Reason and the Industrial Revolution. Before anyone knew what was happening, the Technocracy had their hands in everything. Now, their magic makes the world a better place.

At least, that is the propaganda. I'm not sure on the better place part. I'll give them the bit on making a place, though. I do have to admit that I like my cell phone, and my email, so I can't complain too much. If they would be more best friend and less Big Brother, though, then things would be much better for all of us.

As it is, the Technocracy is one giant organized control freak. They think the best way to guide and shelter and protect humanity is to control it. That's all well and good. Really. Not. Anything that goes against the grain is a threat, and it has to be dealt with. I speak from personal experience.

And the Technocracy's way of dealing with things is not pleasant. If you're lucky, they send field agents after you, what some of us call the MiBs. These characters are not pleasant, but they can be avoided so long as you don't try to exchange words with them or work magic on them. The best thing to do when you see one is waste no time in getting out of the area.





If you're not lucky, you get a HIT Mark after you. These guys are not nice. Super-agents of some kind, they will keep coming until you find a way to destroy them, or reality figures out how fucked up they are. That doesn't usually take long, assuming that you're getting the extreme version. First time that these things try to do anything, people realize how wrong they are, and they eventually have to leave or stop working. Unfortunately, that usually means that innocent people have gotten hurt. Trying to fight them is worse, as they are usually well shielded against magic. Funny how the Technocracy will protect itself against something that it insists no longer exists.

The infuriating thing about the Technocracy is that what is likely to come after is simply field agents. Not Apprentices; not Disciples. Throw-aways. Goons. Goom-bas. Mooks. Which means that if you manage to deal with what came after you, you still have to worry about what sent it, and you can forget learning anything from a captive. And no one wants to attract their attention. Once you deal with what comes after you, even if you figure out where they came from, you're too weak to deal with it. By the time you can, they've moved.

It's the way of the world. Storming their strongholds is suicide. The days of large-scale campaigns are long gone. These days, it's stay out of sight and do whatever covert activity you can. And pray that you don't get caught.

The best way to avoid the Technocracy is to keep out of sight of it. Keep your magic as low-key as possible, find ways to make yourself unnoticeable, and have good escape plans ready for when things go wrong. If you remember that 90% of the clean-up crews work for them, then you'll do good at remembering not to stick around if you cause a disaster. We've all been there. Some of us more than others, and me more than some of them. I'm number 34 on the Technocracy's "Most Wanted" list (last I checked), and I survive by knowing when to stand and when to run. Having contacts to move you "underground" is also a good thing. Nothing like normal, trustworthy non-magicals to cover your trail.

Well, Larry, I hope this is what you wanted.

I'm gone. I think the man across the room has red eyes.

Peace,

Lee Ann

Larry,

Well, we've just been moved up to Public Enemy Number One where the Technos are concerned. Oh, good Lord, where to begin. Ryan and I were wandering, as usual. We'd actually managed to find a Node that wasn't guarded by anything fuzzy. A nice one too. So, we decide to camp for a few days.

The next morning, we hear vehicles. We hide out and watch, and see trucks pull up near the center of the area, where the Node is, though you can't see it with your eyes. The only thing that marks it is a fox den, with a mother fox. I think that the magic has done something to her, as she's not really normal. For one, she doesn't run when people come around. I have a feeling you would be hard pressed to hurt her.

Anyway, the guys in the trucks start forming a circle, and I figure out that it was for a ritual. Sure enough, they start laying out equipment. Then one comes out with a gun. That fox, who had come out of her hole, just stands there. One of the men fires at her, and she realizes too late that something is putting her in danger. It was Ryan that blew our cover. He stands up, his gun drawn, and starts firing as one of the others tags the fox. We barely got away. We checked out the Node later, and sure enough, it was marked. It's faint, so faint that you won't see it unless you know to look for it. We wanted to get the tag off the fox, but couldn't get anywhere near it.

Larry, this is bad. I don't know what's up with the tagging, why they would be doing it, but whatever it's for, they don't want people knowing about it. Ryan and I have been hunted non-stop since then, and I'm not sure what our survivability rate is. We won't make the dinner for your new book. I'm sorry.

All my love,

Lee Ann

We've all been warned about the Technocracy. In some places they go crazy trying to hunt us down and destroy us; in others, they are rather sedate. All depends on the local administration, one would guess.

With the Reckoning come and gone, the Technocracys still the monolith that it always has been — or, at least, that's the image they project. I've gotten a feeling by watching their movements that even they haven't gone totally unscathed. Where before the Technocracy was a juggernaut of precision, now it seems that they're not nearly so efficient. Their agents move in droves, hyperactive, looking for anything — but they don't know what. Their coordination is lacking. It's almost as if all the events of the Reckoning caught them so off-guard that they don't know what to do now.

This Node-tagging incident is somewhat bothersome, though. I'd heard of something similar happening out in the Pacific islands. Looks like the Technocracys tumbled to a new way to hunt us — so if you see any black sedans hanging around your Node, don't just move, but make sure that they didn't leave you any presents.

— X.

## THINGS THAT GO ⊕ BUTTIP IN THE NIGHT



Wait, there's more?

Oh, yes, there is. You've been told about the vampires and werewolves, the fae and ghosts. You know about the Nephandi and the Technocracy. What else can there be?

There are the “non-tagables”; things that you're likely to run across that seem to have no category to fit in. Some of them are benevolent, most of them are dangerous.

A few of them are cute and fuzzy; some of those have teeth. Not all of them are supernatural, though. Some of them fit perfectly into reality's little scheme. Even the supernatural ones seem to exist, on the basis of urban myth and legend.

### THE HUNTERS

Hunters are not pleasant. They've always been around, and they exist in stages of deadly and ineffective. Right now, they exist in the deadly stage. To them, we're witches who will use, abuse and drain humanity. I have to admit, I see their point. For all the good that we do, so much must be sacrificed.

Hunters come in all shapes and sizes. They have only one real thing in common, a desire to find and destroy destructive supernatural elements. Their ideas of destructive vary, but most distrust us (at best).

Previously, hunters just wandered around with a little sorcery, a little attitude and a lot of guns. These days, they've tumbled to something new. They could even be a new group of mages. It seems that a lot of witch-hunters recently have taken up the practice of supernatural power. Nobody knows what prompted this... it's only known that it's bad. See, hunters can see us now. It's not a sure thing, but it seems that the sort of eerie vibe that causes mages

to stand out to normal humans makes them especially noticeable to these witch-hunters.

Worst of all, some hunters are now showing up with powers that can't be explained by the Spheres and can't be easily countered. Your best bet is to lay low and get out of town.

### URBAN MYTHS

Urban myths are things that exist seemingly against the grain of reality. If you investigate, though, you find out that (for instance), while no one has *seen* a sewer 'gator, they agree that one is probably down there. While encountering them can be dangerous, they are one of our best avenues to getting our victory back, and spreading a little enlightenment. The bogeyman, sewer 'gators, giant rats, roaches the size of a small dog. These are all things that the world accepts as possibilities. There are even mythic killers that haunt cities, like eternal Sons of Sam. While some of them are simply normal killers who attain a Resonance about themselves, there are a few that are something else altogether.

### RURAL LEGENDS

Like urban myths, these legends are accepted as possibilities, although few have seen the evidence. They range from the ghost that inspired *Evangeline* to small-town weather witches. UFO's are a modern rural legend. The Big Foot, Native American curses, mysterious desertions of towns are other classics. There is always the “Don't be out after dark because of <<insert anything>>.” There are the big fishes that can eat small children, dogs that slaughter cattle, and the woman who has slept with every man in town. The more rural the area, the more ripe it is to plant seeds of new legends.



## SPIRITS

And there are always spirits. If you attune yourself to the Sphere of Spirit, you can't go anywhere without feeling them. Spirits of nature or innovation, extradimensional creatures, whatever your name for them, they exist. Why? I would imagine because we do. While most seem to go about the purpose of what they represent, there are a few that will mess with you, if they spot you. Usually it is to protect something, to keep you out of something, or to influence you to do something. I could go into all the various kinds, but that is a project in and of itself. The only thing important for the purposes of this dissertation is the awareness that they are out there, and that while it is rare that they interact with this world, it can and does happen.

Some of them have more direct purposes. The ones you would consider extradimensional creatures are usually able to exist because of a following they attract. That can be dangerous. Such cults are often responsible for mass rural and urban slayings and other crimes. If these spirits amass large followings, their power can be something to reckon with.

Dealing with spirits is a two-edged sword for many mages. A mage who's familiar with them can make quite a career of it. Spirits can offer advice and powers that aren't easily duplicated with a limited knowledge of the Spheres. On the other hand, they're also very touchy and demanding. Mages who don't know what they're doing should just be polite and try not to anger them: Spirits not only have their own power, but they have a tendency to go to larger spirits for help.





# APPENDIX: A LITTLE MAGIC



While most of this book covers documents that might be found by a mage or could just be advice for players and Storytellers — your choice — this section covers game-rules-related material. Like any rules,

the ones included here are all totally optional. Some can add greater depth to a character, some open new doors, and some can be abused by unscrupulous players. And be warned: A few further revelations can be found in some of these ideas!

# STORM WARNING!



So you've seen the Avatar Storm in **Mage**, and you're scratching your head, thinking, "How the heck does this apply to my game?"

It's no wonder. The Storm is a rather sudden manifestation and it caught mages quite off-guard. It also behaves in ways that no other magical manifestations have done in the past, so it's creating no end of havoc in the mages' World of Darkness.

However, the effects of the Storm are really up to the Storyteller to interpret, as always. Perhaps the most important facet is to look at what you want the Storm to accomplish in your game. In **Mage**, the Storm has multiple effects, but the Storyteller needs to pick and choose what she wants to showcase. That choice, in turn, describes how the Storm affects the world (if, indeed, the Storyteller uses it at all).

## FLENSED SHARDS OF POWER

First off, a look at what the Storm is all about. As a result of the events in the Reckoning, several nuclear weapons of various powers were detonated — some in the spirit world, some in the material. An ancient city in the lands of the dead was destroyed, and a terrible Maelstrom erupted in the Underworld. Its screaming winds blasted apart the ruined civilizations that ghosts had built from their memories.

When the Sixth Great Maelstrom fired off, its force was sufficient to propel spirits across the Shroud. Some ghosts wound up taking bodies in the physical world. Weak ones animated the corpses of dead animals or people, becoming zombie-like drones. Stronger-willed ghosts actually took over bodies completely and gained a new lease on existence, sometimes even shoving out the still-living psyches and replacing them altogether.

However, various ghosts weren't the only spirit pieces that were shoved through the Gauntlet. Raw spiritual energy surged across various domains. Combined with the powers released when the Digital Web crashed, when Doissetep burned and when Concordia fell, too much stress was placed on the Tapestry. Pieces frayed, twisted and snapped. The whirling, jagged blasts of spiritual energy literally shredded and crumpled multiple Avatars — some on Sleepers, some on others; some, perhaps, that remained free souls. Given spiritual impetus by the Maelstrom and other powerful forces in motion, the howling pieces of semi-aware magical energy circled the globe with the ferocity of hypersonic chunks of metaphysical glass.

End result? Mages who cross the Gauntlet or the Shroud find their own Avatars battered and slashed by these pieces. In some cases, exceptionally unfortunate mages have pieces of their own Avatars broken off to fly, screaming, into the winds. Magical Effects cannot protect against this Storm — magic that settles in the Gauntlet is itself subjected to this sandblasting. As the mage tugs at the Tapestry, his grasp is flensed by the Avatar Storm. Just the action of trying to shield himself draws down the dangerous energies.

Ultimately the storm has the following effects:

- Mages who cross the Gauntlet or Shroud take damage based on their own enlightenment, as described in **Mage**, p. 188. This damage applies even if the mage is just reaching across partially.

- Other enlightened constructs crossing the Gauntlet or Shroud also take damage. That is, a Wonder (which has its own Arete rating) also rolls for damage using its Arete. This damage applies to the Wonder directly, and it may destroy it — Storyteller's discretion as to how much damage a Talisman can take.

- Entities that *don't* have Awakened Avatars in the mage sense — such as shapeshifters and sorcerers — don't suffer from the Avatar Storm.

- Spirits can still cross the Gauntlet or Shroud subject to their normal limitations. They don't necessarily enjoy it, and most need special powers to do so, but the Storm does little more than give them the equivalent of a few psychic nicks and scratches.

- Mages who build magical Effects specifically inside the Gauntlet — a Gauntlet trap with Spirit, for instance, or an attempt at a metaphysical shield against the Storm — roll for damage as if reaching across or into the Gauntlet.

- Effects designed to penetrate the Gauntlet, but launched from one side (say, a Mind message or a Forces Effect that shoots across from one Realm to another) are distorted by the Storm. If the mage builds the Effect purely in one location (say, the material world), he avoids getting dinged by the Storm, but his Effect will be damaged as it crosses. In general, the Storyteller counts the Effect as if it's altered by five dots of *Storm-Tainted Resonance*. Therefore, the Effect rarely does what it was originally designed to do, often fizzles, may only work with partial strength and may hang or get lost in the Storm only to erupt later. In other words, it does whatever the Storyteller thinks would be appropriately random.



In general, the more localized the Effect, the less it suffers from distortion. A bolt of fire launched from the physical world into the Umbral equivalent will be less hampered than a message sent from the Deep Umbra to Earth. The Storm is what causes Sendings — messages sent across the Gauntlet by Masters out in the Umbra — to wind up distorted, and they pick up pieces of partial awareness and mind from Avatar-chunks. Some eventually go on to interpret their emotional context in strange ways.

There's one exception to the effects of the Storm: Spirit Effects designed specifically to call spirit entities are generally simple enough that they will get through without too much interference. Once the spirit responds, commanding it is another matter. For this reason, it's often a good idea to get the spirit to show up and then to suck it up and take the damage from reaching across the Umbra to bind it, instead of setting the binding in motion on the material side and then launching the spell into the Umbra. If a spirit uses **Materialize**, of course, it's subject to whatever the mage does on Earth — likewise, a mage who's already in the Umbra has no problems dealing with a spirit there.

- Masters can remain on Earth. However, since high-enlightenment mages suffer the greatest risk in crossing the Gauntlet, and since healing aggravated injury is tougher on Earth than in the Umbra, most Masters who are in the Umbra opt to stay there. Nothing prevents players' characters from becoming new Masters. Archmages in particular find the crossing particularly lethal, and since their own magic tends to be highly Paradoxical on Earth, none remain on this world (unless the Storyteller specifically wants one).

- Anyone who actually crosses the Gauntlet leaves a trace of the passage that's detectable to people with Spirit magic. This is why it's really risky to cross back into Earth. Not only is it very difficult to heal the damage suffered, but the mage risks drawing the attention of other Spirit practitioners who want to see what's dropped through. It is known that the Technocracy's Earth-bound Void Engineers use early warning Dimensional Science systems to alert them to crossings, and so Tradition mages particularly are at risk of giving away their positions and getting hunted down. Such spiritual "gaps" remain sensible until sunrise or sunset (whichever comes first), and they can usually be detected at a distance proportional to the Gauntlet in the area. Busting through a high-Gauntlet location would make ripples for several miles, while crossing at a powerful Node might only cause ripples for a few feet. These waves don't make subsequent crossings any easier, unfortunately.

- Some Nodes have Shallowings, places where the Umbra and the material touch directly. At such natural gates, it's possible to cross safely without the usual dangers of the Storm. Indeed, people without Spirit magic can sometimes use these points to cross. Naturally, such places are hotly contested properties.

- The Merit: *Stormwarden*, presented in **Mage**, may allow mages to cross the Gauntlet safely. This Merit applies to anything the mage wears or carries, including Wonders. The high-value version of the Merit might let the mage shield an entire group of people or a small vehicle.

## USING AND ABUSING THE STORM

So, what does the Storm mean for your game? Only as much as your Storyteller wants it to. The Storm can just be a background element, it can be a plot hook, or it might not exist at all.

What's important is to use the Storm only inasmuch as you want to integrate various **Mage** plot elements. If you like the idea of keeping the Masters in the Umbra, making spirit travel difficult and basically centering the game around the characters on Earth, the Storm is a neat device. However, it's not the only possible device, and you can easily mess with it in a few ways to suit the themes of your game.

For instance, you might decide that the Storm is really more of a Maelstrom-wind incarnation that whacks *everybody* who crosses the Gauntlet, including shifters and spirits. Deciding thus makes the game focus much more on the material world, and it makes fights for Shallowings that much rougher. Or you could decide to do away with the Storm altogether, in order to come up with your own reason for banishing most of the Masters. Maybe some grand convocation in the Umbra requires their attendance, or maybe all Masters are called away to fight some menace at the edge of the universe.

The Storm is only as important as you decide to let it be thematically.

## THE PLAYERS' PERSPECTIVE

Although the Storyteller decides mostly how the Storm impacts the game world, players shouldn't feel left out in the cold. The nature of the Storm will tell a lot about what you can expect out of the game.

In the core version of the Storm, players' characters can't count on the Masters to help, and they can't risk lots of trips to the Umbra. Therefore, fighting in the material world and taking responsibility for your own

actions becomes more important, since characters have no mentor to rush in and save them. Mages in these games should expect to take up leadership roles in their Traditions and to have to go through all the sorts of crises described previously in this book. A character can be really important with the *Stormwarden* Merit, or if she has a significant library, a mentor who is still an Earthbound Master, or good Leadership and Expression skills to take the reigns of a Tradition and train new Apprentices. **Mage** is a gritty, down-to-Earth game where the mages will have to deal alternately with the mundane world and with the magical world's intrusion on their material lives.

If you still want to tell a story in the Umbra, though, that's quite possible. Once a group is in the Umbra, the Storm itself is less of a concern (although the Maelstrom in the Underworld is still dangerous). If you work up a good Node in your character's background — or if he just has a decent handle on Life and Spirit magic — you can drag the group around in the

Umbra without having to worry, as long as you don't need to come back to Earth too often. There's still room for spaceships and Umbraships and strange Realms, if you want to go that route.

For those who dislike the entire concept, you've just established a quest for your mage. Naturally, mages are less-than-pleased with this total destructiveness in the spirit world. Many want to find ways around it, or ways to fix the entire problem. A mage character could spend his days trying to extend a Shallowing, trying to find some way to make an effective shield that isn't warped by the Storm, or building a device to make passage safe — or even go on an epic quest to try to end the Storm completely. Any of these motivations are suitable for an entire chronicle's worth of play!

Like any other plot device, the Storm is there to further enjoyment of the game, to emphasize certain story elements and to show the world in motion. It's only important inasmuch as it contributes to the fun of *your* game.

## ADDITIONAL BACKGROUNDS



Mages spend a lot more time in human society these days than they used to. With the Umbra even more dangerous than ever, most mages choose to spend a lot of time on Earth. The end of the Ascension War also causes many mages to turn away from their Traditional avenues of warfare, to pay attention to their friends and family. As a result, many mages have escalating standing in everyday mortal society. Many find the tools of the mortal world useful in ways that they hadn't before envisioned, while others are just happy to have some semblance of a normal life.

Just about any mage can benefit from the additional Backgrounds described here or from the new applications of Backgrounds included.

### DIFFERENTIAL BACKGROUNDS

Although the Backgrounds in *Mage* give characters a wide range of options, sometimes it makes sense for a character to have multiple, different versions of the same thing. For instance, a character might have a small group of fairly average allies, as well as one very powerful ally. To represent such gradations, you can use differential Backgrounds.

In brief, when you take a Background for your character, you specify exactly what sort of circumstances generate the Background. Three dots of *Contacts* could

be a large network or one very well-informed individual, while five dots of *Wonder* might be an extremely potent magical item or a bunch of smaller ones. Each Background is purchased separately. Thus, your mage might have two different instances of the same Background: *Allies* ••• to represent a small gang, plus *Allies* ••• to represent a potent mystical companion.

Differential Backgrounds are, of course, only appropriate for social or material Backgrounds. A mage can't have two different *Avatar* Backgrounds without some sort of very strange story! However, a character could have two separate *Resources* (for different incomes) or three different types of *Influence* (in different parts of society).

Usually, purchasing a high level in a Background is more efficient, but it can sometimes be useful to have many smaller, different forms of a Background instead. For instance, you might want your mage to have multiple different alternate identities, so that if one is compromised, the others remain secure. Or he might have a set of individual wonders, which is harder to steal or destroy than a single item.

The limits on differential Backgrounds come at the Storyteller's discretion. Although a Background is usually limited to five dots, different instances of the same Background don't count against one another. A character could have two five-dot alternate identities if you wanted to shell out enough points.



## ALTERNATE IDENTITY

*The cop scrutinized the papers and frowned. Enrique waited patiently. He kept his hands on the steering wheel, looked straight ahead and exuded a combination of boredom and slight anxiety. More than once, the police officer peered up at Enrique, but he said not a word. At length he returned to his squad car to do a little checking by computer.*

*Minutes ticked by as Enrique continued waiting. If necessary, he could simply cloud the cop's mind, but doing so without getting shot, while using a bone rattle and some ululating chants, would've proven difficult. Instead, he simply let the officer run the papers.*

*After a good 20 minutes, the police officer returned to the car and handed him the paperwork.*

*"Sorry about the delay," the cop apologized. "Be careful; the man we're hunting is still out there."*

*Enrique nodded and restarted his car. Aside from a superficial resemblance, there was nothing in the papers to tie him to Xoca, Traditionalist and terrorist.*

Your mage has managed to get something very useful in a world where the Technocracy tracks people by paperwork: a fully supported secondary identity. The character may have anything from a fake driver's license to a complete set of alternate documents of the sort that might be made by the witness protection program. You should specify how your character came across these documents. Did he hack a government computer system? Did he buy a set of forgeries? Did he happen across someone with a similar name and face? The means by which the character acquired the identity also lend some idea of how strong it is and how it might be removed. A forged set of papers can be compromised if the forger talks. A hacked computer record can be traced, especially with technomagic. A coincidental resemblance to another individual can be dug up with enough work.

By itself, an alternate identity provides only limited benefits. The mage can use the identity to buy things, get email accounts, register, get licenses and so on. However, an alternate identity is more useful if additional Backgrounds are stacked with it. An alternate identity might also have the *Resources* Background attached — the mage gets an income, but it traces to the identity — or perhaps *Certification*, allows the mage to practice law under the guise of a different person. (Naturally, you can't stack a mystical Background like *Arcane* or *Avatar* with *Alternate Identity*.)

The level of the *Alternate Identity* Background determines both how much you can stack on it — a flimsy identity can only support so much paperwork — as well as the difficulty in penetrating the identity

(usually something like Intelligence + Investigation, difficulty of *Alternate Identity* rating +3). An *Alternate Identity* can support up to its own rating in additional Backgrounds.

X No alternates: You're just yourself.

- A fake driver's license that looks like your character in bad light, maybe with a sex change.
- A somewhat sloppy fake I.D., perhaps with one supporting document.
- A reasonable set of identification papers, capable of fooling most routine checks.
- An established identity that could go with the character to the grave.
- A fully supported identity, complete with history, full government documentation, alibis and witnesses.

## CERTIFICATION

*The SWAT team had been an unexpected surprise, but Cam didn't really mind them. He'd taken steps to cover this eventuality.*

*Although the neighbors had complained, the police had dropped in, and the SWAT team had been called, there was little they could do. It got the message across. That message was, "I have the means to take care of my territory. I can use it, and you can't stop me."*

*The SWAT captain simply gazed in wonder at Cam's little collection. He seemed especially impressed by the .50 caliber machine gun.*

*"The wonders of a Class-C weapons license," Cam mused.*

*The SWAT captain shook his head. "We don't even have anything that big."*

Your character has passed muster with the officials of some large Sleeper organization that has deemed him fit to hunt wild game, drive trucks, practice law or medicine, carry a concealed weapon, perform marriages or dispose of hazardous waste. Some certifications and clearances are more difficult to obtain than others, requiring years of study and lengthy exams. Others — such as driver's licenses and hunting permits — can be obtained by high school students who've read a book, taken a class and passed a simple test. Certificates and licenses that merely require the filing of a few forms and the payment of a registration fee — such as fishing licenses and mail-order ministries — are free.

Unless your character has bribed or otherwise obtained his certification illicitly, you must take as many dots in the corresponding Ability as the cost of the Background. Thus, your character needs two points of Drive to be a licensed trucker, and four points of Medicine or Law to be a board-certified doctor or lawyer.

You can combine the *Certification Background* with *Alternate Identity* to indicate a character who has papers in more than one persona.

While this Background does not imply any actual savings (take the *Resources Background* for that), it does open the door to generating income through the use of a licensed practice. Thus, a licensed doctor can use the *Medicine Ability* to earn money, as part of the story. This tactic works best if it's roleplayed, as the character stakes out a practice and develops a career. With magic helping out, the mage is almost certain to have a popular practice. Of course, doing so carries its own dangers....

- Hunting license, daycare permit, passport from an open country
- Teaching certificate, security officer firearm's permit, bail bondsman, CPA, trucker's license, notary public
- Concealed weapons permit, hazardous waste disposal, church-ordained priest or minister
- Class-C weapons license, board-certified doctor or lawyer, commercial airline pilot's license
- Diplomatic immunity, license to kill

## FAME

*Grinning facetiously, Jules signed the book with a bit of a flourish. He hadn't thought that anyone actually owned copies of his old novel any more — much less that it had actually acquired a fan base.*

*As the bubbling fan complimented him on his characterization and tone, he let his gaze wander across the bar to the men on the other side. He hadn't used his privileges as a writer before, but in some exclusive clubs, they respected that sort of thing.*

*Nodding once more to the fan, he made a dismissive comment and turned to the bartender. The man alertly waited for his order.*

*"Scotch and soda on the rocks... and who are those folks over there?" he asked casually.*

*The bartender filled the order while answering, "Just some publishing guys, looking for 'new talent.' You know, the next up-and-comer." He paused. "You want I should introduce you?"*

*Jules shook his head. "No, I think my name will stand on its own."*

Since *Awakening* can strike anyone, it may well flash down on someone who's not just the next guy on the street. Indeed, many Traditions claim credit for various luminaries throughout history (and the Technocratic Conventions claim equally many). Although nobody can really state with certainty now

whether Siddharta Gautama, Jim Morrison or Albert Einstein were mages, there is nothing stopping others like them from *Awakening*.

Your mage enjoys widespread recognition in mortal society, perhaps as an entertainer, writer or athlete. People may enjoy just being seen with her. Being famous gives her all manner of privileges in the mundane world, but it can also attract unwanted attention. People watch her, drawing the interest of both *Paradox* and the *Technocracy*, but by the same token, she is viewed as something more than human. People who would drop their dentures to see a *Seven Dragons Spin Kick* would believe it if Bruce Lee did it (aside from the reports of his death), and no one will blink if David Copperfield decides to fly through the air or walk through walls. Similarly, it's harder for the *Technocracy* and others to just make your mage disappear, since they must weigh the trouble caused by one famous *übermensch* versus a thousand conspiracy theories. The powers that be may not like her, but they will tolerate her, and as long as she doesn't do anything too over the top, the *Men in Black* may just let her off with a warning.

This Background is obviously a mixed blessing. You can certainly enjoy the privileges of your character's prestige — getting the best seats, being invited to events you'd otherwise miss, getting appointments with the elite — but your character is also often recognized when she'd rather not be. Fame also fluctuates. Today's *Flavor-of-the-Month* becomes tomorrow's *has-been*. You need to tell your *Storyteller* what you're doing to stay famous, since you can't rest on your laurels forever without the tales and stories fading.

In game terms, you can sometimes use an appropriate *Social Trait* + *Fame* to lean on your image, and gain entry to exclusive clubs and parties, score interviews or hobnob with the elite. *Fame* can help in getting jobs and in keeping up your other Backgrounds. Plus, if your character is famous, it's easier for him to exert his influence. Additionally, your *Storyteller* might permit you to reduce difficulties of *Social* rolls against particularly star-struck or impressionable people. In some circumstances, your mage *might* be able to get away with a little bit of magic as if it were coincidental, because *Sleepers* might believe that he could actually do it the "trick" in question. As long as your character's public image plays into the magic in question (a martial arts star using magic-enhanced unarmed combat, a singing sensation shattering glass or entrancing people and so on), he can get away with it.





- X Just another average Jane or Joe.
- Your mage is known to a select subculture — local club-goers or science-fiction fans, for instance. Or her laurels are severely faded, as would be the case with a former child star or an Olympic medal winner from 50 years past.
  - A majority of the local populace recognizes your character's face. She's a local celebrity such as a news anchor, or a national celebrity of minor interest, such as a new author.
  - Your character has statewide renown. Perhaps she's a state senator or minor star of local interest, or a bit-actor on several television shows. People don't know her name, but they've seen her on TV.
  - Nationally famous. Everybody knows something about your character.
  - Your character is an internationally famous and current media icon.

## RANK

*Mark thumbed the identification carefully. The picture still resembled him (mostly), and although it didn't give him credentials for everything, it would at least give him a chance.*

*Holding the card out, he strolled casually into the building. One of the guards spared a glance but little more. His old military I.D. might be out of date, but it still served.*

*Stepping into the building, Mark tossed off a casual salute to a quickly straightening private, then stepped back to the armory. Sure, he didn't have the papers, but nobody here had enough rank to question him if he pushed the issue....*

Your character is somewhere in the hierarchy of a large and powerful Sleeper organization with extensive resources, countless members of the rank and file, and even more members of the lay public who follow its proceedings and decisions. The organization may be a large military force, royalty of a country that still respects it, an organized religion, a national government, a publishing empire, an Ivy League University, a Fortune 500 company or any other organization of sufficient size and influence. Whatever your choice, membership does have its privileges, as well as its responsibilities. The higher your character's rank, the bigger his expense account and privileges (although you will have to justify both), the greater his access to secure areas and private resources, and the larger his responsibility and the demands on his time. It is possible to go beyond five dots, but doing so is not generally advisable. The German Chancellor, the King of Sweden and the Pope can't just walk into

a bar, regardless of the jokes to the contrary, and while the Caliph of Bagdad supposedly snuck out dressed as a peasant, these aren't the days of the Arabian Nights.

Then again, your mage's rank is only known within that organization, and perhaps to those members of the lay public who respect it, not the great unwashed Masses. Even an archbishop or a general can go to the supermarket and not be recognized as long as he does it away from his local area. If your character wants to be recognized outside of his sphere of influence, purchase the *Fame* background. (If you want him to be Archbishop Whatshisface, purchase *Arcane*.)

Note that, although your organization may have access to *Influence* and *Resources*, your mage can only pull on a limited amount of those Backgrounds. You can generally use your character's rank to pull for influence or resources equal to half the *Rank* Background rating at any time, and you'll have to justify to the organization the use of such material. If you purchase the *Resources* and *Influence* Backgrounds independently of this one, then your mage has his own income and pull, which his rank merely supplements. Thus, a colonel in the U.S. Army should have some *Resources* to represent his regular paycheck — the use of his rank would represent calling on the army for special, additional materials. The sorts of assets available will vary with the organization, at the discretion of the Storyteller. A member of the school board can't get assault weapons through the PTA, and an army officer isn't likely to have huge influence over local school policies.

Note specifically that *Rank* does not apply to one's standing within mage society, which is a function primarily of *Status*. However, an important rank (a churchman in the Celestial Chorus, for instance) may impress some members of certain Traditions. Certain ranks may also require additional supporting Backgrounds. One cannot be an archbishop in the Church without also possessing a certification as a priest, unless the rank is honorary or falsified in some fashion.

X No Rank: The only organization to which you belong is your Tradition, Convention or Craft — if that.

- Novice: army sergeant, squire, deacon, school board member, junior reporter, visiting lecturer, junior manager
- Low Rank: junior officer, knight, prior, city councilor, beat reporter, new professor, senior manager
- Medium Rank: captain, baron, abbot, mayor, local columnist, tenured professor, director of marketing





- High Rank: major, count, bishop, governor, syndicated columnist, faculty department head, junior vice-president
- Command Staff: general, prince, archbishop, senator, national news correspondent, dean, senior vice-president

## RETAINERS

*The servant removed the coat from the banister and brushed it carefully before hanging it in the coat closet. Anastasz headed up the circling staircase as the servant headed toward the kitchen.*

*"Don't forget, I will need the full section from Chaldean spiritualism in the upper tower this evening," Anastasz called without turning back.*

*"Of course, sir," the servant demurred as he pulled the pistol from its customary case in the closet. Checking the action and making sure that the pistol was still functional, the servant nodded to himself before shutting the closet and making his way to the study. It never hurt to be prepared.*

While allies are normal mortals who can be called on to help out, and contacts offer up information, retainers are mortals who are specifically devoted to the mage

in question. They may be on the payroll, they might be mind-controlled, they might owe a specific favor or debt that keeps them in servitude, or they might just be stuck in the mage's house in the Umbra. Whatever the case, retainers are fairly loyal, fairly competent help who look out for the mage's needs, make life comfortable and keep the home fires burning.

While retainers are rarely as skilled as allies or as knowledgeable as contacts, they are on hand most of the time to do dirty work directly for their magely masters. Retainers can do everything from laundry to wetwork. Of course, it's incumbent on you to work with your Storyteller in determining how your mage came to have these retainers, and how far they'll go. Remember, not all retainers are totally loyal or competent — but they can be a great help and an extra pair of hands.

X No retainers: You take care of business yourself.

- One retainer
- Two retainers
- Three retainers
- Four retainers
- Five retainers

# ADDITIONAL MERITS AND FLAWS



## TRADITION HERALD (2 PT. SOCIAL MERIT)

Your character has been recognized by the Traditions as a formal herald. He is granted safe passage in all Tradition territory, such as Channies and Nodes, and he can expect hospitality from Tradition mages. In the modern age, this hospitality may just include crash space on a couch and a meal from McDonald's, but it's enough to survive.

Your mage may be asked to carry messages physically, since magical methods can be detected and intercepted while he can (theoretically) defend himself. Although you cannot expect to enter the inner Sanctums of most Traditions, he can ask for audience with their heads and expect to be heard (at some point). You can also expect passage into and through territory that's special to a Tradition, such as admittance to a historic Akashic monastery where other mages are normally not permitted, for instance.

Furthermore, any Traditionalist who attacks your character except in self-defense is subject to censure and branding. If your character aggravates the attack

(taunting someone until he attacks), he may also be stripped of his position and branded. In general, however, he's safe from direct fighting among the Traditions. A herald can still be challenged to certámen, though. He can speak the truth freely or even insult people in a diplomatic capacity, but he'd better make sure that he's *right*.

## FACTION FOUNDER (4 PT. SOCIAL MERIT)

Your character has broken with Tradition and founded her own faction. Several acolytes pay heed to her beliefs, she can get recognition as a political force in her Tradition, and she can train Apprentices with her special area of concern.

In game terms, you get a one-point bonus on Social rolls within your mage's own Tradition. You get respect (and sometimes fear) for paving new ground. When you teach a newly Awakened Initiate, he learns your chosen faction special Sphere in addition to your normal Tradition specialty.

In story terms, your character probably has several followers and maybe even some Apprentices (take Backgrounds as appropriate). She can start a Chantry

and be recognized, and her faction will live on in the annals of Tradition history!

Obviously, this Merit is a *great* hook for political chronicles.

### PROTEAN PSYCHE (7 PT. MENTAL MERIT)

Like the stonecutter in the old Chinese folktale, your character has been a deer, a tiger, the rain, the wind, a rock and a stonecutter. Or at least, if she hasn't been all these things, she can easily *imagine* being all these things, and imagination is the most important thing.

If your mage is ever placed in a different body, the experience is perfectly natural. A man? Fine. A woman? Of course. A stoat? No problem. A 50-headed, 20-horned, million-tentacled thingy, like something from Japanese anime as reinterpreted by St. John the Baptist? Sure, sounds good.

If your mage is a shapechanger or a body-snatcher, or even a Virtual Adept who changes his icons on the Digital Web frequently, this Merit is almost a necessity. The alternative is to be faced with an unfamiliar body each time, or live existence with a limited catalog of familiar forms (see **Mage: The Ascension** p. 171). As an added benefit, you do not need to make Willpower checks when sighting Progenitor monstrosities, horrors from the Deep Umbra, Crinos-form werewolves or Tzimisce Zulo forms because *you've been there*. Or at least your character's imagination has.

### ANACHRONISM (1 TO 3-PT. MENTAL FLAW)

Your mage was raised in another time, and she hasn't quite caught up to the present. Maybe she traveled forward (or backward) in time, or sideways from a parallel universe. Maybe the Awakening made her recall one of her past lives so vividly that she thinks she's supposed to be in 10th century Egypt. Or maybe she's from one of the few quaint backwaters of the present day, and everything in the modern western world might as well be Mars for all the sense it makes to her.

For one point, the character is just a little out of sync. Pick any decade from the 20th or 21st century, excepting those on both sides of the current one, and set your attitudes and beliefs accordingly. For two points, pick any decade in the 18th or 19th century (or 22nd or 23rd). For three points, pick any decade from the 17th century or before, or any particularly well-insulated backwater of the present day (if any still exist), or just some totally weird social behavioral construct. The character has a two-point difficulty penalty when

dealing with anything outside this cultural identity. Thus, a character used to the 1800s has trouble with computers, but he understands light bulbs; a character from a hypothetical 23rd-century parallel universe might have trouble with telephones, which never existed in her world experience!

This Flaw can be bought off over time and with roleplaying. However, in the mean time, culture shock can be fun.

### DISTORTED IMAGE (1-PT. SUPERNATURAL FLAW)

Your character's image does not do what it's supposed to; that is, look like her. Her shadow may make obscene gestures behind her back or show the form of her alter-shape, and her reflection pulls faces at her from the mirror or reveals to her companions that she is, in reality, a dragon or a vacationing extradimensional horror. Worse yet, this trouble extends to all audio-visual equipment and any likeness created by particularly talented artists. However, since said artists have probably already seen the mage for what she really is (or imagines herself to be), this Flaw isn't as much of a problem as the mall security cameras showing that Shiva the Destroyer is in Housewares, Aisle 6.

### HORRIFYING (7 PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

Something about your character's appearance inspires horror, like the man-beast form of the werewolf or the monstrous beasts of legend or the raw circuitry and wires of a HIT Mark with its synth-flesh torn off. You may not use Social Traits (except for Intimidation), except in regards to other characters who are horrifying in the same way or those who cannot see what makes your character so disturbing.

However, appearance isn't everything. The beetles crawling through the decaying hole in your character's chest can be covered up with a nice thick turtleneck and cloven hooves can be stuffed into ordinary cowboy boots. (Remember all the strikes Wilbur Whately had going against him and what a snappy dresser he was!) Therefore, your character can generally disguise whatever makes him horrifying (with a successful Wits + Subterfuge roll) and present an ordinary or even handsome human face to the rest of the world, depending on his exact problem.

Obviously, if this trait is easily disguised and worked around, then this Flaw is pretty worthless. Storytellers should make sure that social interaction forces the mage to deal with the consequences of this Flaw.



## TERRITORIAL (2-PT. MENTAL FLAW)

Your mage is extremely protective of his Chantry, his sanctum, and everything he considers his. The character is distrustful of strangers and ridiculously overprotective of guests. He flips out if he finds out that anyone's been in his room, or worse yet, messing with his stuff, and he goes overboard on security measures, warding and so forth. Your mage has probably locked his magic books so tightly shut that he's forgotten how to open them, and friends

and Chantry-mates have to deal with the fallout from this behavior. If he's shy, this behavior becomes even worse. The mage goes out of his way to avoid people, and he closets himself away like a hermit.

Any time someone violates your mage's "stuff" (steals one of his possessions, enters his place uninvited while he's there, messes with his familiar), you must expend a Willpower point or else your mage automatically flies into a rage and seeks retribution.

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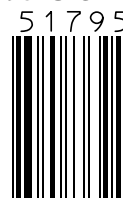
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